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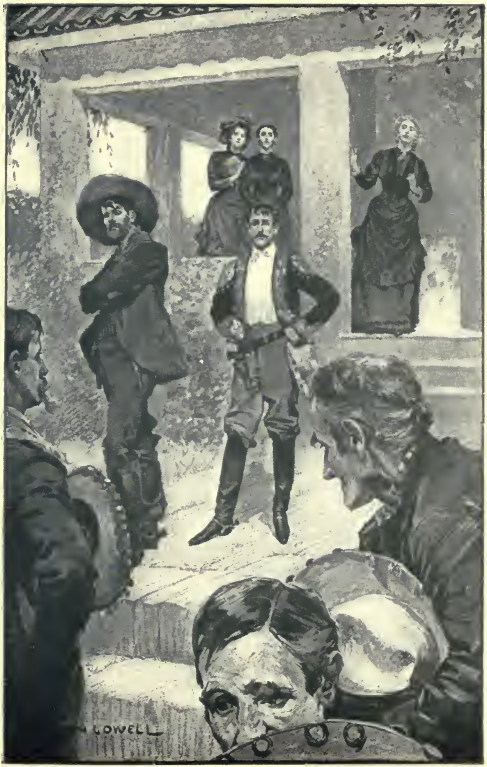

"IT WAS SUSY'S WORDS THAT STUNG THEIR EARS"
—*Susy: A Story of the Plains*

"ARGONAUT EDITION" OF
THE WORKS OF BRET HARTE

THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP

SUSY

A Story of the Plains

BY

BRET HARTE

ILLUSTRATED

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

Published under special arrangement with the Houghton Mifflin Company

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SKETCHES.

PREFACE.

A SERIES of designs — suggested, I think, by Hogarth's familiar cartoons of the Industrious and Idle Apprentices — I remember as among the earliest efforts at moral teaching in California. They represented the respective careers of The Honest and Dissolute Miners: the one, as I recall him, retrograding through successive planes of dirt, drunkenness, disease, and death; the other advancing by corresponding stages to affluence and a white shirt. Whatever may have been the artistic defects of these drawings, the moral at least was obvious and distinct. That it failed, however, — as it did, — to produce the desired reform in mining morality may have been owing to the fact that the average miner refused to recognize himself in either of these positive characters; and that even he who might have sat for the model of the Dissolute Miner was perhaps dimly conscious of some limitations and circumstances which partly relieved him from responsibility. "Yer see," remarked such a critic to the writer, in the untranslatable poetry of his class, "it ain't no square game. They 've just put up the keerds on that chap from the start."

With this lamentable example before me, I trust that in the following sketches I have abstained from any positive moral. I might have painted my villains of the blackest dye, — so black, indeed, that the originals thereof would have contemplated them with the glow of comparative virtue. I might have made it impossible for them to have performed a virtuous or generous action, and have thus avoided that moral confusion which is apt to arise in the contemplation of mixed motives and qualities. But I should have burdened myself with the responsibility of their creation, which, as a humble writer of romance and entitled to no particular reverence, I did not care to do.

I fear I cannot claim, therefore, any higher motive than to illustrate an era of which Californian history has preserved the incidents more often than the character of the actors, — an era which the panegyrist was too often content to bridge over with a general compliment to its survivors, — an era still so recent that in attempting to revive its poetry, I am conscious also of awakening the more prosaic recollections of these same survivors, — and yet an era replete with a certain heroic Greek poetry, of which perhaps none were more unconscious than the heroes themselves. And I shall be quite content to have collected here merely the materials for the Iliad that is yet to be sung.

San Francisco, December 24, 1869.

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THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP.

THERE was commotion in Roaring Camp. It could not have been a fight, for in 1850 that was not novel enough to have called together the entire settlement. The ditches and claims were not only deserted, but "Tuttle's grocery" had contributed its gamblers, who, it will be remembered, calmly continued their game the day that French Pete and Kanaka Joe shot each other to death over the bar in the front room. The whole camp was collected before a rude cabin on the outer edge of the clearing. Conversation was carried on in a low tone, but the name of a woman was frequently repeated. It was a name familiar enough in the camp, — "Cherokee Sal."

Perhaps the less said of her the better. She was a coarse, and, it is to be feared, a very sinful woman. But at that time she was the only woman in Roaring Camp, and was just then lying in sore extremity, when she most needed the ministration of her own sex. Dissolute, abandoned, and irreclaimable, she was yet suffering a martyrdom hard enough to bear even when veiled by

sympathizing womanhood, but now terrible in her loneliness. The primal curse had come to her in that original isolation which must have made the punishment of the first transgression so dreadful. It was, perhaps, part of the expiation of her sin, that, at a moment when she most lacked her sex's intuitive tenderness and care, she met only the half-contemptuous faces of her masculine associates. Yet a few of the spectators were, I think, touched by her sufferings. Sandy Tipton thought it was "rough on Sal," and, in the contemplation of her condition, for a moment rose superior to the fact that he had an ace and two bowers in his sleeve.

It will be seen, also, that the situation was novel. Deaths were by no means uncommon in Roaring Camp, but a birth was a new thing. People had been dismissed the camp effectively, finally, and with no possibility of return; but this was the first time that anybody had been introduced *ab initio*. Hence the excitement.

"You go in there, Stumpy," said a prominent citizen known as "Kentuck," addressing one of the loungers. "Go in there, and see what you kin do. You've had experience in them things."

Perhaps there was a fitness in the selection. Stumpy, in other climes, had been the putative head of two families; in fact, it was owing to some legal informality in these proceedings that Roaring

Camp — a city of refuge — was indebted to his company. The crowd approved the choice, and Stumpy was wise enough to bow to the majority. The door closed on the extempore surgeon and midwife, and Roaring Camp sat down outside, smoked its pipe, and awaited the issue.

The assemblage numbered about a hundred men. One or two of these were actual fugitives from justice, some were criminal, and all were reckless. Physically, they exhibited no indication of their past lives and character. The greatest scamp had a Raphael face, with a profusion of blond hair; Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner. The term "roughs" applied to them was a distinction rather than a definition. Perhaps in the minor details of fingers, toes, ears, etc., the camp may have been deficient, but these slight omissions did not detract from their aggregate force. The strongest man had but three fingers on his right hand; the best shot had but one eye.

Such was the physical aspect of the men that were dispersed around the cabin. The camp lay in a triangular valley, between two hills and a river. The only outlet was a steep trail over the summit of a hill that faced the cabin, now illumi-

nated by the rising moon. The suffering woman might have seen it from the rude bunk whereon she lay, — seen it winding like a silver thread until it was lost in the stars above.

A fire of withered pine-boughs added sociability to the gathering. By degrees the natural levity of Roaring Camp returned. Bets were freely offered and taken regarding the result. Three to five that "Sal would get through with it"; even, that the child would survive; side bets as to the sex and complexion of the coming stranger. In the midst of an excited discussion an exclamation came from those nearest the door, and the camp stopped to listen. Above the swaying and moaning of the pines, the swift rush of the river, and the crackling of the fire, rose a sharp, querulous cry, — a cry unlike anything heard before in the camp. The pines stopped moaning, the river ceased to rush, and the fire to crackle. It seemed as if Nature had stopped to listen too.

The camp rose to its feet as one man! It was proposed to explode a barrel of gunpowder, but, in consideration of the situation of the mother, better counsels prevailed, and only a few revolvers were discharged; for, whether owing to the rude surgery of the camp, or some other reason, Cherokee Sal was sinking fast. Within an hour she had climbed, as it were, that rugged road that led to the stars, and so passed out of Roaring Camp, its

sin and shame forever. I do not think that the announcement disturbed them much, except in speculation as to the fate of the child. "Can he live now?" was asked of Stumpy. The answer was doubtful. The only other being of Cherokee Sal's sex and maternal condition in the settlement was an ass. There was some conjecture as to fitness, but the experiment was tried. It was less problematical than the ancient treatment of Romulus and Remus, and apparently as successful.

When these details were completed, which exhausted another hour, the door was opened, and the anxious crowd of men who had already formed themselves into a queue, entered in single file. Beside the low bunk or shelf, on which the figure of the mother was starkly outlined below the blankets stood a pine table. On this a candle-box was placed, and within it, swathed in staring red flannel, lay the last arrival at Roaring Camp. Beside the candle-box was placed a hat. Its use was soon indicated. "Gentlemen," said Stumpy, with a singular mixture of authority and *ex officio* complacency, — "Gentlemen will please pass in at the front door, round the table, and out at the back door. Them as wishes to contribute anything toward the orphan will find a hat handy." The first man entered with his hat on; he uncovered, however, as he looked about him, and so, unconsciously, set an example to the next. In such commu-

nities good and bad actions are catching. As the procession filed in, comments were audible, — criticisms addressed, perhaps, rather to Stumpy, in the character of showman, — "Is that him?" "mighty small specimen"; "has n't mor'n got the color"; "ain't bigger nor a derringer." The contributions were as characteristic: A silver tobacco-box; a doubloon; a navy revolver, silver mounted; a gold specimen; a very beautifully embroidered lady's handkerchief (from Oakhurst the gambler); a diamond breastpin; a diamond ring (suggested by the pin, with the remark from the giver that he "saw *that* pin and went two diamonds better"); a slung shot; a Bible (contributor not detected); a golden spur; a silver teaspoon (the initials, I regret to say, were not the giver's); a pair of surgeon's shears; a lancet; a Bank of England note for £ 5; and about $ 200 in loose gold and silver coin. During these proceedings Stumpy maintained a silence as impassive as the dead on his left, a gravity as inscrutable as that of the newly born on his right. Only one incident occurred to break the monotony of the curious procession. As Kentuck bent over the candle-box half curiously, the child turned, and, in a spasm of pain, caught at his groping finger, and held it fast for a moment. Kentuck looked foolish and embarrassed. Something like a blush tried to assert itself in his weather-beaten cheek. "The d—d little cuss!"

he said, as he extricated his finger, with, perhaps, more tenderness and care than he might have been deemed capable of showing. He held that finger a little apart from its fellows as he went out, and examined it curiously. The examination provoked the same original remark in regard to the child. In fact, he seemed to enjoy repeating it. "He rastled with my finger," he remarked to Tipton, holding up the member, "the d—d little cuss!"

It was four o'clock before the camp sought repose. A light burnt in the cabin where the watchers sat, for Stumpy did not go to bed that night. Nor did Kentuck. He drank quite freely, and related with great gusto his experience, invariably ending with his characteristic condemnation of the new-comer. It seemed to relieve him of any unjust implication of sentiment, and Kentuck had the weaknesses of the nobler sex. When everybody else had gone to bed, he walked down to the river, and whistled reflectingly. Then he walked up the gulch, past the cabin, still whistling with demonstrative unconcern. At a large redwood tree he paused and retraced his steps, and again passed the cabin. Half-way down to the river's bank he again paused, and then returned and knocked at the door. It was opened by Stumpy. "How goes it?" said Kentuck, looking past Stumpy toward the candle-box. "All serene," replied Stumpy. "Anything up?" "Nothing."

There was a pause — an embarrassing one — Stumpy still holding the door. Then Kentuck had recourse to his finger, which he held up to Stumpy. "Rastled with it, — the d—d little cuss," he said, and retired.

The next day Cherokee Sal had such rude sepulture as Roaring Camp afforded. After her body had been committed to the hillside, there was a formal meeting of the camp to discuss what should be done with her infant. A resolution to adopt it was unanimous and enthusiastic. But an animated discussion in regard to the manner and feasibility of providing for its wants at once sprung up. It was remarkable that the argument partook of none of those fierce personalities with which discussions were usually conducted at Roaring Camp. Tipton proposed that they should send the child to Red Dog, — a distance of forty miles, — where female attention could be procured. But the unlucky suggestion met with fierce and unanimous opposition. It was evident that no plan which entailed parting from their new acquisition would for a moment be entertained. "Besides," said Tom Ryder, "them fellows at Red Dog would swap it, and ring in somebody else on us." A disbelief in the honesty of other camps prevailed at Roaring Camp as in other places.

The introduction of a female nurse in the camp also met with objection. It was argued that no

decent woman could be prevailed to accept Roaring Camp as her home, and the speaker urged that "they did n't want any more of the other kind." This unkind allusion to the defunct mother, harsh as it may seem, was the first spasm of propriety, — the first symptom of the camp's regeneration. Stumpy advanced nothing. Perhaps he felt a certain delicacy in interfering with the selection of a possible successor in office. But when questioned, he averred stoutly that he and "Jinny" — the mammal before alluded to — could manage to rear the child. There was something original, independent, and heroic about the plan that pleased the camp. Stumpy was retained. Certain articles were sent for to Sacramento. "Mind," said the treasurer, as he pressed a bag of gold-dust into the expressman's hand, "the best that can be got, — lace, you know, and filigree-work and frills, — d—m the cost!"

Strange to say, the child thrived. Perhaps the invigorating climate of the mountain camp was compensation for material deficiencies. Nature took the foundling to her broader breast. In that rare atmosphere of the Sierra foot-hills, — that air pungent with balsamic odor, that ethereal cordial at once bracing and exhilarating, — he may have found food and nourishment, or a subtle chemistry that transmuted asses' milk to lime and phosphorus. Stumpy inclined to the belief that it was the

latter and good nursing. "Me and that ass," he would say, "has been father and mother to him! Don't you," he would add, apostrophizing the helpless bundle before him, "never go back on us."

By the time he was a month old, the necessity of giving him a name became apparent. He had generally been known as "the Kid," "Stumpy's boy," "the Cayote" (an allusion to his vocal powers), and even by Kentuck's endearing diminutive of "the d—d little cuss." But these were felt to be vague and unsatisfactory, and were at last dismissed under another influence. Gamblers and adventurers are generally superstitious, and Oakhurst one day declared that the baby had brought "the luck" to Roaring Camp. It was certain that of late they had been successful. "Luck" was the name agreed upon, with the prefix of Tommy for greater convenience. No allusion was made to the mother, and the father was unknown. "It 's better," said the philosophical Oakhurst, "to take a fresh deal all round. Call him Luck, and start him fair." A day was accordingly set apart for the christening. What was meant by this ceremony the reader may imagine, who has already gathered some idea of the reckless irreverence of Roaring Camp. The master of ceremonies was one "Boston," a noted wag, and the occasion seemed to promise the greatest facetiousness. This ingenious satirist had spent two

days in preparing a burlesque of the church service, with pointed local allusions. The choir was properly trained, and Sandy Tipton was to stand godfather. But after the procession had marched to the grove with music and banners, and the child had been deposited before a mock altar, Stumpy stepped before the expectant crowd. "It ain't my style to spoil fun, boys," said the little man, stoutly, eying the faces around him, "but it strikes me that this thing ain't exactly on the squar. It 's playing it pretty low down on this yer baby to ring in fun on him that he ain't going to understand. And ef there 's going to be any godfathers round, I 'd like to see who 's got any better rights than me." A silence followed Stumpy's speech. To the credit of all humorists be it said, that the first man to acknowledge its justice was the satirist, thus stopped of his fun. "But," said Stumpy, quickly, following up his advantage, "we 're here for a christening, and we 'll have it. I proclaim you Thomas Luck, according to the laws of the United States and the State of California, so help me God." It was the first time that the name of the Deity had been uttered otherwise than profanely in the camp. The form of christening was perhaps even more ludicrous than the satirist had conceived; but, strangely enough, nobody saw it and nobody laughed. "Tommy" was christened as seriously as he would have been under a Chris-

tian roof, and cried and was comforted in as orthodox fashion.

And so the work of regeneration began in Roaring Camp. Almost imperceptibly a change came over the settlement. The cabin assigned to "Tommy Luck" — or "The Luck," as he was more frequently called — first showed signs of improvement. It was kept scrupulously clean and whitewashed. Then it was boarded, clothed, and papered. The rosewood cradle — packed eighty miles by mule — had, in Stumpy's way of putting it, "sorter killed the rest of the furniture." So the rehabilitation of the cabin became a necessity. The men who were in the habit of lounging in at Stumpy's to see "how The Luck got on" seemed to appreciate the change, and, in self-defence, the rival establishment of "Tuttle's grocery" bestirred itself, and imported a carpet and mirrors. The reflections of the latter on the appearance of Roaring Camp tended to produce stricter habits of personal cleanliness. Again, Stumpy imposed a kind of quarantine upon those who aspired to the honor and privilege of holding "The Luck." It was a cruel mortification to Kentuck — who, in the carelessness of a large nature and the habits of frontier life, had begun to regard all garments as a second cuticle, which, like a snake's, only sloughed off through decay — to be debarred this privilege from certain prudential reasons. Yet such was the

subtle influence of innovation that he thereafter appeared regularly every afternoon in a clean shirt, and face still shining from his ablutions. Nor were moral and social sanitary laws neglected. "Tommy," who was supposed to spend his whole existence in a persistent attempt to repose, must not be disturbed by noise. The shouting and yelling which had gained the camp its infelicitous title were not permitted within hearing distance of Stumpy's. The men conversed in whispers, or smoked with Indian gravity. Profanity was tacitly given up in these sacred precincts, and throughout the camp a popular form of expletive, known as "D—n the luck!" and "Curse the luck!" was abandoned, as having a new personal bearing. Vocal music was not interdicted, being supposed to have a soothing, tranquillizing quality, and one song, sung by "Man-o'-War Jack," an English sailor, from her Majesty's Australian colonies, was quite popular as a lullaby. It was a lugubrious recital of the exploits of "the Arethusa, Seventy-four," in a muffled minor, ending with a prolonged dying fall at the burden of each verse, "On b-o-o-o-ard of the Arethusa." It was a fine sight to see Jack holding The Luck, rocking from side to side as if with the motion of a ship, and crooning forth this naval ditty. Either through the peculiar rocking of Jack or the length of his song,—it contained ninety stanzas, and was con-

tinued with conscientious deliberation to the bitter end, — the lullaby generally had the desired effect. At such times the men would lie at full length under the trees, in the soft summer twilight, smoking their pipes and drinking in the melodious utterances. An indistinct idea that this was pastoral happiness pervaded the camp. "This 'ere kind o' think," said the Cockney Simmons, meditatively reclining on his elbow, "is 'evingly." It reminded him of Greenwich.

On the long summer days The Luck was usually carried to the gulch, from whence the golden store of Roaring Camp was taken. There, on a blanket spread over pine-boughs, he would lie while the men were working in the ditches below. Latterly, there was a rude attempt to decorate this bower with flowers and sweet-smelling shrubs, and generally some one would bring him a cluster of wild honeysuckles, azaleas, or the painted blossoms of Las Mariposas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were beauty and significance in these trifles, which they had so long trodden carelessly beneath their feet. A flake of glittering mica, a fragment of variegated quartz, a bright pebble from the bed of the creek, became beautiful to eyes thus cleared and strengthened, and were invariably put aside for "The Luck." It was wonderful how many treasures the woods and hillsides yielded that "would do for Tommy." Sur-

rounded by playthings such as never child out of fairy-land had before, it is to be hoped that Tommy was content. He appeared to be securely happy-albeit there was an infantine gravity about him a contemplative light in his round gray eyes that sometimes worried Stumpy. He was always tractable and quiet, and it is recorded that once having crept beyond his "corral," — a hedge of tessellated pine-boughs, which surrounded his bed, — he dropped over the bank on his head in the soft earth, and remained with his mottled legs in the air in that position for at least five minutes with unflinching gravity. He was extricated without a murmur. I hesitate to record the many other instances of his sagacity, which rest, unfortunately, upon the statements of prejudiced friends. Some of them were not without a tinge of superstition. "I crep' up the bank just now," said Kentuck one day, in a breathless state of excitement, "and dern my skin if he was n't a talking to a jaybird as was a sittin' on his lap. There they was, just as free and sociable as anything you please, a jawin' at each other just like two cherry-bums." Howbeit, whether creeping over the pine-boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves above him, to him the birds sang, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight

that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the balm of bay and resinous gums; to him the tall red-woods nodded familiarly and sleepily, the bumble-bees buzzed, and the rooks cawed a slumbrous accompaniment.

Such was the golden summer of Roaring Camp. They were "flush times," — and the Luck was with them. The claims had yielded enormously. The camp was jealous of its privileges and looked suspiciously on strangers. No encouragement was given to immigration, and, to make their seclusion more perfect, the land on either side of the mountain wall that surrounded the camp they duly preempted. This, and a reputation for singular proficiency with the revolver, kept the reserve of Roaring Camp inviolate. The expressman — their only connecting link with the surrounding world — sometimes told wonderful stories of the camp. He would say, "They 've a street up there in 'Roaring,' that would lay over any street in Red Dog. They 've got vines and flowers round their houses, and they wash themselves twice a day. But they 're mighty rough on strangers, and they worship an Ingin baby."

With the prosperity of the camp came a desire for further improvement. It was proposed to build a hotel in the following spring, and to invite one or two decent families to reside there for the sake

of "The Luck," — who might perhaps profit by female companionship. The sacrifice that this concession to the sex cost these men, who were fiercely sceptical in regard to its general virtue and usefulness, can only be accounted for by their affection for Tommy. A few still held out. But the resolve could not be carried into effect for three months, and the minority meekly yielded in the hope that something might turn up to prevent it. And it did.

The winter of 1851 will long be remembered in the foot-hills. The snow lay deep on the Sierras, and every mountain creek became a river, and every river a lake. Each gorge and gulch was transformed into a tumultuous watercourse that descended the hillsides, tearing down giant trees and scattering its drift and débris along the plain. Red Dog had been twice under water, and Roaring Camp had been forewarned. "Water put the gold into them gulches," said Stumpy. "It's been here once and will be here again!" And that night the North Fork suddenly leaped over its banks, and swept up the triangular valley of Roaring Camp.

In the confusion of rushing water, crushing trees, and crackling timber, and the darkness which seemed to flow with the water and blot out the fair valley, but little could be done to collect the scattered camp. When the morning broke, the cabin of

Stumpy nearest the river-bank was gone. Higher up the gulch they found the body of its unlucky owner; but the pride, the hope, the joy, the Luck, of Roaring Camp had disappeared. They were returning with sad hearts, when a shout from the bank recalled them.

It was a relief-boat from down the river. They had picked up, they said, a man and an infant, nearly exhausted, about two miles below. Did anybody know them, and did they belong here?

It needed but a glance to show them Kentuck lying there, cruelly crushed and bruised, but still holding the Luck of Roaring Camp in his arms. As they bent over the strangely assorted pair, they saw that the child was cold and pulseless. "He is dead," said one. Kentuck opened his eyes. "Dead?" he repeated feebly. "Yes, my man, and you are dying too." A smile lit the eyes of the expiring Kentuck. "Dying," he repeated, "he's a taking me with him, — tell the boys I've got the Luck with me now"; and the strong man, clinging to the frail babe as a drowning man is said to cling to a straw, drifted away into the shadowy river that flows forever to the unknown sea.

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT.

AS Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the twenty-third of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances. There was a Sabbath lull in the air, which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause, was another question. "I reckon they're after somebody," he reflected; "likely it's me." He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was "after somebody." It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm

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of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard of two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example, and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. "It's agin justice," said Jim Wheeler, "to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp—an entire stranger—carry away our money." But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower local prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly that he was aware of the hesitation of his judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept Fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game, and

he recognized the usual percentage in favor of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as "The Duchess"; another, who had won the title of "Mother Shipton"; and "Uncle Billy," a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only, when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

As the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from the Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of the Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward. With the easy good-humor

characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding-horse, "Five Spot," for the sorry mule which the Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat draggled plumes with a feeble, faded coquetry; Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of "Five Spot" with malevolence, and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema.

The road to Sandy Bar—a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants—lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day's severe travel. In that advanced season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foot-hills into the dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheatre, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was, undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished,

and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of "throwing up their hand before the game was played out." But they were furnished with liquor, which in this emergency stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience. In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose state into one of stupor, the Duchess became maudlin, and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

Mr. Oakhurst did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he "could n't afford it." As he gazed at his recumbent fellow-exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah-trade, his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious.

He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him; at the sky, ominously clouded; at the valley below, already deepening into shadow. And, doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh, open face of the new-comer Mr. Oakhurst recognized Tom Simson, otherwise known as "The Innocent" of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a "little game," and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune —amounting to some forty dollars—of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door and thus addressed him: "Tommy, you 're a good little man, but you can 't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it over again." He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

There was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. "Alone?" No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Did n't Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so

they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp and company. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine-tree, where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognize in Mr. Oakhurst's kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavored to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain. He even pointed out the fact that there was no provision, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, the Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions, and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log-house near the trail. "Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst," said the Innocent, pointing to the Duchess, "and I can shift for myself."

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst's admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled to retire

up the cañon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine-trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire—for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast—in apparently amicable conversation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive, girlish fashion to the Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days. The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. "Is this yer a d—d picnic?" said Uncle Billy, with inward scorn, as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing firelight, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

As the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine-trees, and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine-boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted, they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the

malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it,—snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

The momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humored, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailer sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians, and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snow-flakes, that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the

landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words,—"snowed in!"

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut, and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that with care and prudence they might last ten days longer. "That is," said Mr. Oakhurst, *sotto voce* to the Innocent, "if you 're willing to board us. If you ain't —and perhaps you 'd better not—you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions." For some occult reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to the Duchess and Mother Shipton, who of course knew the facts of their associate's defection. "They 'll find out the truth about us *all* when they find out anything," he added, significantly, "and there's no good frightening them now."

Tom Simson not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. "We 'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow 'll melt, and we 'll all go back together." The cheerful gayety of the young man, and Mr. Oakhurst's calm infected the others. The Inno-

cent, with the aid of pine-boughs, extemporized a thatch for the roofless cabin, and the Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent. "I reckon now you 're used to fine things at Poker Flat," said Piney. The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through its professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney not to "chatter." But when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks. He stopped in some alarm, and his thoughts first naturally reverted to the whiskey, which he had prudently *cachéd*. "And yet it don't somehow sound like whiskey," said the gambler. It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still-blinding storm and the group around it that he settled to the conviction that it was "square fun."

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had *cachéd* his cards with the whiskey as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton's words, he "did n't say cards once" during that evening. Haply the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from

its keys, to an accompaniment by the Innocent on a pair of bone castinets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter's swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain:—

> "I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I'm bound to die in His army."

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward, as if in token of the vow.

At midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson, somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to the Innocent, by saying that he had "often been a week without sleep." "Doing what?" asked Tom. "Poker!" replied Oakhurst, sententiously; "when a man gets a streak of luck, —nigger-luck,—he don't get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck," continued the gambler, reflectively, "is a mighty queer thing. All you know

about it for certain is that it 's bound to change. And it 's finding out when it 's going to change that makes you. We 've had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat,—you come along, and slap you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along you 're all right. For,'' added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance,—

> " 'I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I'm bound to die in His army.' "

The third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut,—a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvellously clear air the smoke of the pastoral village of Poker Flat rose miles away. Mother Shipton saw it, and from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness, hurled in that direction a final malediction. It was her last vituperative attempt, and perhaps for that reason was invested with a certain degree of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed the Duchess. ''Just you go out there and cuss, and see.'' She then set her-

self to the task of amusing "the child," as she and the Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she did n't swear and was n't improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges, the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering camp-fire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney,—story-telling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed, too, but for the Innocent. Some months before he had chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope's ingenious translation of the Iliad. He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem—having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words —in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so for the rest of that night the Homeric demigods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the cañon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus. Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of "Ash-heels," as the Innocent persisted in denominating the "swift-footed Achilles."

So with small food and much of Homer and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snow-flakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white, that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton—once the strongest of the party—seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. "I 'm going," she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, "but don't say anything about it. Don't waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it." Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton's rations for the last week, untouched. "Give 'em to the child," she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. "You 've starved yourself," said the gambler. "That 's what they call it," said the woman, querulously, as she lay down again, and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snow-shoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack-saddle. "There 's one chance in a hundred to save her yet," he said, pointing to Piney; "but it 's there," he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. "If you can reach there in two days she 's safe." "And you?" asked Tom Simson. "I 'll stay here," was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. "You are not going, too?" said the Duchess, as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. "As far as the cañon," he replied. He turned suddenly, and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame, and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the Duchess, feeding the fire, found that some one had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke; but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess's waist. They kept

this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting pines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, the Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours: "Piney, can you pray?" "No, dear," said Piney, simply. The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney's shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine-boughs, flew like white-winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon through the rifted clouds looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them, which was she that had sinned.

Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other's arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine-trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie-knife. It bore the following, written in pencil, in a firm hand:—

†

BENEATH THIS TREE
LIES THE BODY
OF
JOHN OAKHURST,
WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK
ON THE 23D OF NOVEMBER, 1850,
AND
HANDED IN HIS CHECKS
ON THE 7TH DECEMBER, 1850.

†

And pulseless and cold, with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

MIGGLES.

WE were eight, including the driver. We had not spoken during the passage of the last six miles, since the jolting of the heavy vehicle over the roughening road had spoiled the Judge's last poetical quotation. The tall man beside the Judge was asleep, his arm passed through the swaying strap and his head resting upon it, — altogether a limp, helpless-looking object, as if he had hanged himself and been cut down too late. The French lady on the back seat was asleep, too, yet in a half-conscious propriety of attitude, shown even in the disposition of the handkerchief which she held to her forehead and which partially veiled her face. The lady from Virginia City, travelling with her husband, had long since lost all individuality in a wild confusion of ribbons, veils, furs, and shawls. There was no sound but the rattling of wheels and the dash of rain upon the roof. Suddenly the stage stopped and we became dimly aware of voices. The driver was evidently in the midst of an exciting colloquy with some one in the road, — a colloquy of which such fragments as "bridge gone," "twenty feet of water,"

"can't pass," were occasionally distinguishable above the storm. Then came a lull, and a mysterious voice from the road shouted the parting adjuration, —

"Try Miggles's."

We caught a glimpse of our leaders as the vehicle slowly turned, of a horseman vanishing through the rain, and we were evidently on our way to Miggles's.

Who and where was Miggles? The Judge, our authority, did not remember the name, and he knew the country thoroughly. The Washoe traveller thought Miggles must keep a hotel. We only knew that we were stopped by high water in front and rear, and that Miggles was our rock of refuge. A ten minutes' splashing through a tangled by-road, scarcely wide enough for the stage, and we drew up before a barred and boarded gate in a wide stone wall or fence about eight feet high. Evidently Miggles's, and evidently Miggles did not keep a hotel.

The driver got down and tried the gate. It was securely locked.

"Miggles! O Miggles!"

No answer.

"Migg-ells! You Miggles!" continued the driver, with rising wrath.

"Migglesy!" joined in the expressman, persuasively. "O Miggy! Mig!"

But no reply came from the apparently insensate Miggles. The Judge, who had finally got the window down, put his head out and propounded a series of questions, which if answered categorically would have undoubtedly elucidated the whole mystery, but which the driver evaded by replying that "if we did n't want to sit in the coach all night, we had better rise up and sing out for Miggles."

So we rose up and called on Miggles in chorus; then separately. And when we had finished, a Hibernian fellow-passenger from the roof called for "Maygells!" whereat we all laughed. While we were laughing, the driver cried "Shoo!"

We listened. To our infinite amazement the chorus of "Miggles" was repeated from the other side of the wall, even to the final and supplemental "Maygells."

"Extraordinary echo," said the Judge.

"Extraordinary d—d skunk!" roared the driver, contemptuously. "Come out of that, Miggles, and show yourself! Be a man, Miggles! Don't hide in the dark; I would n't if I were you, Miggles," continued Yuba Bill, now dancing about in an excess of fury.

"Miggles!" continued the voice, "O Miggles!"

"My good man! Mr. Myghail!" said the Judge, softening the asperities of the name as much as possible. "Consider the inhospitality of refusing

shelter from the inclemency of the weather to helpless females. Really, my dear sir — " But a succession of "Miggles," ending in a burst of laughter, drowned his voice.

Yuba Bill hesitated no longer. Taking a heavy stone from the road, he battered down the gate, and with the expressman entered the enclosure. We followed. Nobody was to be seen. In the gathering darkness all that we could distinguish was that we were in a garden — from the rose-bushes that scattered over us a minute spray from their dripping leaves — and before a long, rambling wooden building.

"Do you know this Miggles?" asked the Judge of Yuba Bill.

"No, nor don't want to," said Bill, shortly, who felt the Pioneer Stage Company insulted in his person by the contumacious Miggles.

"But, my dear sir," expostulated the Judge, as he thought of the barred gate.

"Lookee here," said Yuba Bill, with fine irony, "had n't you better go back and sit in the coach till yer introduced? I 'm going in," and he pushed open the door of the building.

A long room lighted only by the embers of a fire that was dying on the large hearth at its further extremity; the walls curiously papered, and the flickering firelight bringing out its grotesque pattern; somebody sitting in a large arm-chair

by the fireplace. All this we saw as we crowded together into the room, after the driver and expressman.

"Hello, be you Miggles?" said Yuba Bill to the solitary occupant.

The figure neither spoke nor stirred. Yuba Bill walked wrathfully toward it, and turned the eye of his coach-lantern upon its face. It was a man's face, prematurely old and wrinkled, with very large eyes, in which there was that expression of perfectly gratuitous solemnity which I had sometimes seen in an owl's. The large eyes wandered from Bill's face to the lantern, and finally fixed their gaze on that luminous object, without further recognition.

Bill restrained himself with an effort.

"Miggles! Be you deaf? You ain't dumb anyhow, you know"; and Yuba Bill shook the insensate figure by the shoulder.

To our great dismay, as Bill removed his hand, the venerable stranger apparently collapsed,—sinking into half his size and an undistinguishable heap of clothing.

"Well, dern my skin," said Bill, looking appealingly at us, and hopelessly retiring from the contest.

The Judge now stepped forward, and we lifted the mysterious invertebrate back into his original position. Bill was dismissed with the lantern to

reconnoitre outside, for it was evident that from the helplessness of this solitary man there must be attendants near at hand, and we all drew around the fire. The Judge, who had regained his authority, and had never lost his conversational amiability, — standing before us with his back to the hearth, — charged us, as an imaginary jury, as follows : —

"It is evident that either our distinguished friend here has reached that condition described by Shakespeare as 'the sere and yellow leaf,' or has suffered some premature abatement of his mental and physical faculties. Whether he is really the Miggles — "

Here he was interrupted by "Miggles! O Miggles! Migglesy! Mig!" and, in fact, the whole chorus of Miggles in very much the same key as it had once before been delivered unto us.

We gazed at each other for a moment in some alarm. The Judge, in particular, vacated his position quickly, as the voice seemed to come directly over his shoulder. The cause, however, was soon discovered in a large magpie who was perched upon a shelf over the fireplace, and who immediately relapsed into a sepulchral silence, which contrasted singularly with his previous volubility. It was, undoubtedly, his voice which we had heard in the road, and our friend in the chair was not responsible for the discourtesy

Yuba Bill, who re-entered the room after an unsuccessful search, was loath to accept the explanation, and still eyed the helpless sitter with suspicion. He had found a shed in which he had put up his horses, but he came back dripping and sceptical. "Thar ain't nobody but him within ten mile of the shanty, and that 'ar d—d old skeesicks knows it."

But the faith of the majority proved to be securely based. Bill had scarcely ceased growling before we heard a quick step upon the porch, the trailing of a wet skirt, the door was flung open, and with a flash of white teeth, a sparkle of dark eyes, and an utter absence of ceremony or diffidence, a young woman entered, shut the door, and, panting, leaned back against it.

"O, if you please, I 'm Miggles!"

And this was Miggles! this bright-eyed, full-throated young woman, whose wet gown of coarse blue stuff could not hide the beauty of the feminine curves to which it clung; from the chestnut crown of whose head, topped by a man's oil-skin sou'wester, to the little feet and ankles, hidden somewhere in the recesses of her boy's brogans, all was grace;— this was Miggles, laughing at us, too, in the most airy, frank, off-hand manner imaginable.

"You see, boys," said she, quite out of breath, and holding one little hand against her side, quite

unheeding the speechless discomfiture of our party, or the complete demoralization of Yuba Bill, whose features had relaxed into an expression of gratuitous and imbecile cheerfulness, — "you see, boys, I was mor'n two miles away when you passed down the road. I thought you might pull up here, and so I ran the whole way, knowing nobody was home but Jim, — and — and — I 'm out of breath — and — that lets me out."

And here Miggles caught her dripping oil-skin hat from her head, with a mischievous swirl that scattered a shower of rain-drops over us; attempted to put back her hair; dropped two hair-pins in the attempt; laughed and sat down beside Yuba Bill, with her hands crossed lightly on her lap.

The Judge recovered himself first, and essayed an extravagant compliment.

"I 'll trouble you for that thar har-pin," said Miggles, gravely. Half a dozen hands were eagerly stretched forward; the missing hair-pin was restored to its fair owner; and Miggles, crossing the room, looked keenly in the face of the invalid. The solemn eyes looked back at hers with an expression we had never seen before. Life and intelligence seemed to struggle back into the rugged face. Miggles laughed again, — it was a singularly eloquent laugh, — and turned her black eyes and white teeth once more toward us.

"This afflicted person is—" hesitated the Judge.

"Jim," said Miggles.

"Your father?"

"No."

"Brother?"

"No."

"Husband?"

Miggles darted a quick, half-defiant glance at the two lady passengers who I had noticed did not participate in the general masculine admiration of Miggles, and said, gravely, "No; it's Jim."

There was an awkward pause. The lady passengers moved closer to each other; the Washoe husband looked abstractedly at the fire; and the tall man apparently turned his eyes inward for self-support at this emergency. But Miggles's laugh, which was very infectious, broke the silence. "Come," she said briskly, "you must be hungry. Who 'll bear a hand to help me get tea?"

She had no lack of volunteers. In a few moments Yuba Bill was engaged like Caliban in bearing logs for this Miranda; the expressman was grinding coffee on the veranda; to myself the arduous duty of slicing bacon was assigned; and the Judge lent each man his good-humored and voluble counsel. And when Miggles, assisted by the Judge and our Hibernian "deck passen-

ger," set the table with all the available crockery, we had become quite joyous, in spite of the rain that beat against windows, the wind that whirled down the chimney, the two ladies who whispered together in the corner, or the magpie who uttered a satirical and croaking commentary on their conversation from his perch above. In the now bright, blazing fire we could see that the walls were papered with illustrated journals, arranged with feminine taste and discrimination. The furniture was extemporized, and adapted from candle-boxes and packing-cases, and covered with gay calico, or the skin of some animal. The arm-chair of the helpless Jim was an ingenious variation of a flour-barrel. There was neatness, and even a taste for the picturesque, to be seen in the few details of the long low room.

The meal was a culinary success. But more, it was a social triumph, — chiefly, I think, owing to the rare tact of Miggles in guiding the conversation, asking all the questions herself, yet bearing throughout a frankness that rejected the idea of any concealment on her own part, so that we talked of ourselves, of our prospects, of the journey, of the weather, of each other, — of everything but our host and hostess. It must be confessed that Miggles's conversation was never elegant, rarely grammatical, and that at times she employed expletives, the use of which had generally been yielded

to our sex. But they were delivered with such a lighting up of teeth and eyes, and were usually followed by a laugh — a laugh peculiar to Miggles — so frank and honest that it seemed to clear the moral atmosphere.

Once, during the meal, we heard a noise like the rubbing of a heavy body against the outer walls of the house. This was shortly followed by a scratching and sniffling at the door. "That's Joaquin," said Miggles, in reply to our questioning glances; "would you like to see him?" Before we could answer she had opened the door, and disclosed a half-grown grizzly, who instantly raised himself on his haunches, with his forepaws hanging down in the popular attitude of mendicancy, and looked admiringly at Miggles, with a very singular resemblance in his manner to Yuba Bill. "That's my watch-dog," said Miggles, in explanation. "O, he don't bite," she added, as the two lady passengers fluttered into a corner. "Does he, old Toppy?" (the latter remark being addressed directly to the sagacious Joaquin.) "I tell you what, boys," continued Miggles, after she had fed and closed the door on *Ursa Minor*, "you were in big luck that Joaquin was n't hanging round when you dropped in to-night." "Where was he?" asked the Judge. "With me," said Miggles. "Lord love you; he trots round with me nights like as if he was a man."

We were silent for a few moments, and listened to the wind. Perhaps we all had the same picture before us, — of Miggles walking through the rainy woods, with her savage guardian at her side. The Judge, I remember, said something about Una and her lion; but Miggles received it as she did other compliments, with quiet gravity. Whether she was altogether unconscious of the admiration she excited, — she could hardly have been oblivious of Yuba Bill's adoration, — I know not; but her very frankness suggested a perfect sexual equality that was cruelly humiliating to the younger members of our party.

The incident of the bear did not add anything in Miggles's favor to the opinions of those of her own sex who were present. In fact, the repast over, a chillness radiated from the two lady passengers that no pine-boughs brought in by Yuba Bill and cast as a sacrifice upon the hearth could wholly overcome. Miggles felt it; and, suddenly declaring that it was time to "turn in," offered to show the ladies to their bed in an adjoining room. "You, boys, will have to camp out here by the fire as well as you can," she added, "for thar ain't but the one room."

Our sex — by which, my dear sir, I allude of course to the stronger portion of humanity — has been generally relieved from the imputation of curiosity, or a fondness for gossip. Yet I am con-

strained to say, that hardly had the door closed on Miggles than we crowded together, whispering, snickering, smiling, and exchanging suspicions, surmises, and a thousand speculations in regard to our pretty hostess and her singular companion. I fear that we even hustled that imbecile paralytic, who sat like a voiceless Memnon in our midst, gazing with the serene indifference of the Past in his passionless eyes upon our wordy counsels. In the midst of an exciting discussion the door opened again, and Miggles re-entered.

But not, apparently, the same Miggles who a few hours before had flashed upon us. Her eyes were downcast, and as she hesitated for a moment on the threshold, with a blanket on her arm, she seemed to have left behind her the frank fearlessness which had charmed us a moment before. Coming into the room, she drew a low stool beside the paralytic's chair, sat down, drew the blanket over her shoulders, and saying, "If it 's all the same to you, boys, as we 're rather crowded, I 'll stop here to-night," took the invalid's withered hand in her own, and turned her eyes upon the dying fire. An instinctive feeling that this was only premonitory to more confidential relations, and perhaps some shame at our previous curiosity, kept us silent. The rain still beat upon the roof, wandering gusts of wind stirred the embers into momentary brightness, until, in a lull of the elements,

Miggles suddenly lifted up her head, and, throwing her hair over her shoulder, turned her face upon the group and asked, —

"Is there any of you that knows me?"

There was no reply.

"Think again! I lived at Marysville in '53. Everybody knew me there, and everybody had the right to know me. I kept the Polka Saloon until I came to live with Jim. That's six years ago. Perhaps I've changed some."

The absence of recognition may have disconcerted her. She turned her head to the fire again, and it was some seconds before she again spoke, and then more rapidly: —

"Well, you see I thought some of you must have known me. There's no great harm done, anyway. What I was going to say was this: Jim here" — she took his hand in both of hers as she spoke — "used to know me, if you did n't, and spent a heap of money upon me. I reckon he spent all he had. And one day - - it's six years ago this winter — Jim came into my back room, sat down on my sofy, like as you see him in that chair, and never moved again without help. He was struck all of a heap, and never seemed to know what ailed him. The doctors came and said as how it was caused all along of his way of life, — for Jim was mighty free and wild like, — and that he would never get better, and could n't last

long anyway. They advised me to send him to Frisco to the hospital, for he was no good to any one and would be a baby all his life. Perhaps it was something in Jim's eye, perhaps it was that I never had a baby, but I said 'No.' I was rich then, for I was popular with everybody, — gentlemen like yourself, sir, came to see me, — and I sold out my business and bought this yer place, because it was sort of out of the way of travel, you see, and I brought my baby here."

With a woman's intuitive tact and poetry, she had, as she spoke, slowly shifted her position so as to bring the mute figure of the ruined man between her and her audience, hiding in the shadow behind it, as if she offered it as a tacit apology for her actions. Silent and expressionless, it yet spoke for her; helpless, crushed, and smitten with the Divine thunderbolt, it still stretched an invisible arm around her.

Hidden in the darkness, but still holding his hand, she went on: —

"It was a long time before I could get the hang of things about yer, for I was used to company and excitement. I could n't get any woman to help me, and a man I dursent trust; but what with the Indians hereabout, who 'd do odd jobs for me, and having everything sent from the North Fork, Jim and I managed to worry through. The Doctor would run up from Sacramento once in a

while. He 'd ask to see 'Miggles's baby,' as he called Jim, and when he 'd go away, he 'd say, 'Miggles; you 're a trump, — God bless you'; and it did n't seem so lonely after that. But the last time he was here he said, as he opened the door to go, 'Do you know, Miggles, your baby will grow up to be a man yet and an honor to his mother; but not here, Miggles, not here!' And I thought he went away sad, — and — and — " and here Miggles's voice and head were somehow both lost completely in the shadow.

" The folks about here are very kind," said Miggles, after a pause, coming a little into the light again. " The men from the fork used to hang around here, until they found they was n't wanted, and the women are kind, — and don't call. I was pretty lonely until I picked up Joaquin in the woods yonder one day, when he was n't so high, and taught him to beg for his dinner; and then thar 's Polly — that 's the magpie — she knows no end of tricks, and makes it quite sociable of evenings with her talk, and so I don't feel like as I was the only living being about the ranch. And Jim here," said Miggles, with her old laugh again, and coming out quite into the firelight, " Jim — why, boys, you would admire to see how much he knows for a man like him. Sometimes I bring him flowers, and he looks at 'em just as natural as if he knew 'em: and times, when we 're sitting

alone, I read him those things on the wall. Why, Lord!" said Miggles, with her frank laugh, "I 've read him that whole side of the house this winter. There never was such a man for reading as Jim."

"Why," asked the Judge, "do you not marry this man to whom you have devoted your youthful life?"

"Well, you see," said Miggles, "it would be playing it rather low down on Jim, to take advantage of his being so helpless. And then, too, if we were man and wife, now, we 'd both know that I was *bound* to do what I do now of my own accord."

"But you are young yet and attractive —"

"It 's getting late," said Miggles, gravely, "and you 'd better all turn in. Good-night, boys"; and, throwing the blanket over her head, Miggles laid herself down beside Jim's chair, her head pillowed on the low stool that held his feet, and spoke no more. The fire slowly faded from the hearth; we each sought our blankets in silence; and presently there was no sound in the long room but the pattering of the rain upon the roof, and the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

It was nearly morning when I awoke from a troubled dream. The storm had passed, the stars were shining, and through the shutterless window the full moon, lifting itself over the solemn pines without, looked into the room. It touched the

lonely figure in the chair with an infinite compassion, and seemed to baptize with a shining flood the lowly head of the woman whose hair, as in the sweet old story, bathed the feet of him she loved. It even lent a kindly poetry to the rugged outline of Yuba Bill, half reclining on his elbow between them and his passengers, with savagely patient eyes keeping watch and ward. And then I fell asleep and only woke at broad day, with Yuba Bill standing over me, and "All aboard" ringing in my ears.

Coffee was waiting for us on the table, but Miggles was gone. We wandered about the house and lingered long after the horses were harnessed, but she did not return. It was evident that she wished to avoid a formal leave-taking, and had so left us to depart as we had come. After we had helped the ladies into the coach, we returned to the house and solemnly shook hands with the paralytic Jim, as solemnly settling him back into position after each hand-shake. Then we looked for the last time around the long low room, at the stool where Miggles had sat, and slowly took our seats in the waiting coach. The whip cracked, and we were off!

But as we reached the high-road, Bill's dexterous hand laid the six horses back on their haunches, and the stage stopped with a jerk. For there, on a little eminence beside the road, stood Miggles,

her hair flying, her eyes sparkling, her white handkerchief waving, and her white teeth flashing a last "good-by." We waved our hats in return. And then Yuba Bill, as if fearful of further fascination, madly lashed his horses forward, and we sank back in our seats. We exchanged not a word until we reached the North Fork, and the stage drew up at the Independence House. Then, the Judge leading, we walked into the bar-room and took our places gravely at the bar.

"Are your glasses charged, gentlemen?" said the Judge, solemnly taking off his white hat.

They were.

"Well, then, here's to *Miggles*. GOD BLESS HER!"

Perhaps He had. Who knows?

TENNESSEE'S PARTNER.

I DO not think that we ever knew his real name. Our ignorance of it certainly never gave us any social inconvenience, for at Sandy Bar in 1854 most men were christened anew. Sometimes these appellatives were derived from some distinctiveness of dress, as in the case of "Dungaree Jack"; or from some peculiarity of habit, as shown in "Saleratus Bill," so called from an undue proportion of that chemical in his daily bread; or from some unlucky slip, as exhibited in "The Iron Pirate," a mild, inoffensive man, who earned that baleful title by his unfortunate mispronunciation of the term "iron pyrites." Perhaps this may have been the beginning of a rude heraldry; but I am constrained to think that it was because a man's real name in that day rested solely upon his own unsupported statement. "Call yourself Clifford, do you?" said Boston, addressing a timid new-comer with infinite scorn; "hell is full of such Cliffords!" He then introduced the unfortunate man, whose name happened to be really Clifford, as "Jay-bird Charley,"—an unhallowed inspiration of the moment, that clung to him ever after.

But to return to Tennessee's Partner, whom we never knew by any other than this relative title; that he had ever existed as a separate and distinct individuality we only learned later. It seems that in 1853 he left Poker Flat to go to San Francisco, ostensibly to procure a wife. He never got any farther than Stockton. At that place he was attracted by a young person who waited upon the table at the hotel where he took his meals. One morning he said something to her which caused her to smile not unkindly, to somewhat coquettishly break a plate of toast over his upturned, serious, simple face, and to retreat to the kitchen. He followed her, and emerged a few moments later, covered with more toast and victory. That day week they were married by a Justice of the Peace, and returned to Poker Flat. I am aware that something more might be made of this episode, but I prefer to tell it as it was current at Sandy Bar, — in the gulches and bar-rooms, — where all sentiment was modified by a strong sense of humor.

Of their married felicity but little is known, perhaps for the reason that Tennessee, then living with his partner, one day took occasion to say something to the bride on his own account, at which, it is said, she smiled not unkindly and chastely retreated, — this time as far as Marysville, where Tennessee followed her, and where they went to housekeeping without the aid of a Justice

of the Peace. Tennessee's Partner took the loss of his wife simply and seriously, as was his fashion. But to everybody's surprise, when Tennessee one day returned from Marysville, without his partner's wife, — she having smiled and retreated with somebody else, — Tennessee's Partner was the first man to shake his hand and greet him with affection. The boys who had gathered in the cañon to see the shooting were naturally indignant. Their indignation might have found vent in sarcasm but for a certain look in Tennessee's Partner's eye that indicated a lack of humorous appreciation. In fact, he was a grave man, with a steady application to practical detail which was unpleasant in a difficulty.

Meanwhile a popular feeling against Tennessee had grown up on the Bar. He was known to be a gambler; he was suspected to be a thief. In these suspicions Tennessee's Partner was equally compromised; his continued intimacy with Tennessee after the affair above quoted could only be accounted for on the hypothesis of a copartnership of crime. At last Tennessee's guilt became flagrant. One day he overtook a stranger on his way to Red Dog. The stranger afterward related that Tennessee beguiled the time with interesting anecdote and reminiscence, but illogically concluded the interview in the following words: "And now, young man, I 'll trouble you for your knife, your

pistols, and your money. You see your weppings might get you into trouble at Red Dog, and your money's a temptation to the evilly disposed. I think you said your address was San Francisco. I shall endeavor to call." It may be stated here that Tennessee had a fine flow of humor, which no business preoccupation could wholly subdue.

This exploit was his last. Red Dog and Sandy Bar made common cause against the highwayman. Tennessee was hunted in very much the same fashion as his prototype, the grizzly. As the toils closed around him, he made a desperate dash through the Bar, emptying his revolver at the crowd before the Arcade Saloon, and so on up Grizzly Cañon; but at its farther extremity he was stopped by a small man on a gray horse. The men looked at each other a moment in silence. Both were fearless, both self-possessed and independent; and both types of a civilization that in the seventeenth century would have been called heroic, but, in the nineteenth, simply "reckless." "What have you got there? — I call," said Tennessee, quietly. "Two bowers and an ace," said the stranger, as quietly, showing two revolvers and a bowie-knife. "That takes me," returned Tennessee; and with this gamblers' epigram, he threw away his useless pistol, and rode back with his captor.

It was a warm night. The cool breeze which

usually sprang up with the going down of the sun behind the *chaparral*-crested mountain was that evening withheld from Sandy Bar. The little cañon was stifling with heated resinous odors, and the decaying drift-wood on the Bar sent forth faint, sickening exhalations. The feverishness of day, and its fierce passions, still filled the camp. Lights moved restlessly along the bank of the river, striking no answering reflection from its tawny current. Against the blackness of the pines the windows of the old loft above the express-office stood out staringly bright; and through their curtainless panes the loungers below could see the forms of those who were even then deciding the fate of Tennessee. And above all this, etched on the dark firmament, rose the Sierra, remote and passionless, crowned with remoter passionless stars.

The trial of Tennessee was conducted as fairly as was consistent with a judge and jury who felt themselves to some extent obliged to justify, in their verdict, the previous irregularities of arrest and indictment. The law of Sandy Bar was implacable, but not vengeful. The excitement and personal feeling of the chase were over; with Tennessee safe in their hands they were ready to listen patiently to any defence, which they were already satisfied was insufficient. There being no doubt in their own minds, they were willing to give the prisoner the benefit of any that might exist. Se-

cure in the hypothesis that he ought to be hanged, on general principles, they indulged him with more latitude of defence than his reckless hardihood seemed to ask. The Judge appeared to be more anxious than the prisoner, who, otherwise unconcerned, evidently took a grim pleasure in the responsibility he had created. "I don't take any hand in this yer game," had been his invariable, but good-humored reply to all questions. The Judge — who was also his captor — for a moment vaguely regretted that he had not shot him "on sight," that morning, but presently dismissed this human weakness as unworthy of the judicial mind. Nevertheless, when there was a tap at the door, and it was said that Tennessee's Partner was there on behalf of the prisoner, he was admitted at once without question. Perhaps the younger members of the jury, to whom the proceedings were becoming irksomely thoughtful, hailed him as a relief.

For he was not, certainly, an imposing figure. Short and stout, with a square face, sunburned into a preternatural redness, clad in a loose duck "jumper," and trousers streaked and splashed with red soil, his aspect under any circumstances would have been quaint, and was now even ridiculous. As he stooped to deposit at his feet a heavy carpet-bag he was carrying, it became obvious, from partially developed legends and inscriptions,

that the material with which his trousers had been patched had been originally intended for a less ambitious covering. Yet he advanced with great gravity, and after having shaken the hand of each person in the room with labored cordiality, he wiped his serious, perplexed face on a red bandanna handkerchief, a shade lighter than his complexion, laid his powerful hand upon the table to steady himself, and thus addressed the Judge: —

"I was passin' by," he began, by way of apology, "and I thought I 'd just step in and see how things was gittin' on with Tennessee thar, — my pardner. It 's a hot night. I disremember any sich weather before on the Bar."

He paused a moment, but nobody volunteering any other meteorological recollection, he again had recourse to his pocket-handkerchief, and for some moments mopped his face diligently.

"Have you anything to say in behalf of the prisoner?" said the Judge, finally.

"Thet 's it," said Tennessee's Partner, in a tone of relief. "I come yar as Tennessee's pardner, — knowing him nigh on four year, off and on, wet and dry, in luck and out o' luck. His ways ain't allers my ways, but thar ain't any p'ints in that young man, thar ain't any liveliness as he 's been up to, as I don't know. And you sez to me, sez you, — confidential-like, and between man and man, — sez you, 'Do you know anything in his behalf?' and I

sez to you, sez I, — confidential-like, as between man and man, — 'What should a man know of his pardner?'"

"Is this all you have to say?" asked the Judge, impatiently, feeling, perhaps, that a dangerous sympathy of humor was beginning to humanize the Court.

"Thet 's so," continued Tennessee's Partner. "It ain't for me to say anything agin' him. And now, what 's the case? Here 's Tennessee wants money, wants it bad, and does n't like to ask it of his old pardner. Well, what does Tennessee do? He lays for a stranger, and he fetches that stranger. And you lays for *him*, and you fetches *him;* and the honors is easy. And I put it to you, bein' a far-minded man, and to you, gentlemen, all, as far-minded men, ef this is n't so."

"Prisoner," said the Judge, interrupting, "have you any questions to ask this man?"

"No! no!" continued Tennessee's Partner, hastily. "I play this yer hand alone. To come down to the bed-rock, it 's just this: Tennessee, thar, has played it pretty rough and expensive-like on a stranger, and on this yer camp. And now, what 's the fair thing? Some would say more; some would say less. Here 's seventeen hundred dollars in coarse gold and a watch, — it 's about all my pile, — and call it square!" And before a hand could be raised to prevent him, he

had emptied the contents of the carpet-bag upon the table.

For a moment his life was in jeopardy. One or two men sprang to their feet, several hands groped for hidden weapons, and a suggestion to "throw him from the window" was only overridden by a gesture from the Judge. Tennessee laughed. And apparently oblivious of the excitement, Tennessee's Partner improved the opportunity to mop his face again with his handkerchief.

When order was restored, and the man was made to understand, by the use of forcible figures and rhetoric, that Tennessee's offence could not be condoned by money, his face took a more serious and sanguinary hue, and those who were nearest to him noticed that his rough hand trembled slightly on the table. He hesitated a moment as he slowly returned the gold to the carpet-bag, as if he had not yet entirely caught the elevated sense of justice which swayed the tribunal, and was perplexed with the belief that he had not offered enough. Then he turned to the Judge, and saying, "This yer is a lone hand, played alone, and without my pardner," he bowed to the jury and was about to withdraw, when the Judge called him back. "If you have anything to say to Tennessee, you had better say it now." For the first time that evening the eyes of the prisoner and his strange advocate met. Tennessee smiled, showed

his white teeth, and, saying, "Euchred, old man!" held out his hand. Tennessee's Partner took it in his own, and saying, "I just dropped in as I was passin' to see how things was gettin' on," let the hand passively fall, and adding that "it was a warm night," again mopped his face with his handkerchief, and without another word withdrew.

The two men never again met each other alive. For the unparalleled insult of a bribe offered to Judge Lynch — who, whether bigoted, weak, or narrow, was at least incorruptible — firmly fixed in the mind of that mythical personage any wavering determination of Tennessee's fate; and at the break of day he was marched, closely guarded, to meet it at the top of Marley's Hill.

How he met it, how cool he was, how he refused to say anything, how perfect were the arrangements of the committee, were all duly reported, with the addition of a warning moral and example to all future evil-doers, in the Red Dog Clarion, by its editor, who was present, and to whose vigorous English I cheerfully refer the reader. But the beauty of that midsummer morning, the blessed amity of earth and air and sky, the awakened life of the free woods and hills, the joyous renewal and promise of Nature, and above all, the infinite Serenity that thrilled through each, was not reported, as not being a part of the social lesson. And yet, when the weak and foolish deed

was done, and a life, with its possibilities and responsibilities, had passed out of the misshapen thing that dangled between earth and sky, the birds sang, the flowers bloomed, the sun shone, as cheerily as before; and possibly the Red Dog Clarion was right.

Tennessee's Partner was not in the group that surrounded the ominous tree. But as they turned to disperse attention was drawn to the singular appearance of a motionless donkey-cart halted at the side of the road. As they approached, they at once recognized the venerable "Jenny" and the two-wheeled cart as the property of Tennessee's Partner, — used by him in carrying dirt from his claim; and a few paces distant the owner of the equipage himself, sitting under a buckeye-tree, wiping the perspiration from his glowing face. In answer to an inquiry, he said he had come for the body of the "diseased," "if it was all the same to the committee." He did n't wish to "hurry anything"; he could "wait." He was not working that day; and when the gentlemen were done with the "diseased," he would take him. "Ef thar is any present," he added, in his simple, serious way, "as would care to jine in the fun'l, they kin come." Perhaps it was from a sense of humor, which I have already intimated was a feature of Sandy Bar, — perhaps it was from something even better than that; but two thirds of the loungers accepted the invitation at once.

It was noon when the body of Tennessee was delivered into the hands of his partner. As the cart drew up to the fatal tree, we noticed that it contained a rough, oblong box, — apparently made from a section of sluicing, — and half filled with bark and the tassels of pine. The cart was further decorated with slips of willow, and made fragrant with buckeye-blossoms. When the body was deposited in the box, Tennessee's Partner drew over it a piece of tarred canvas, and gravely mounting the narrow seat in front, with his feet upon the shafts, urged the little donkey forward. The equipage moved slowly on, at that decorous pace which was habitual with "Jenny" even under less solemn circumstances. The men — half curiously, half jestingly, but all good-humoredly — strolled along beside the cart; some in advance, some a little in the rear of the homely catafalque. But, whether from the narrowing of the road or some present sense of decorum, as the cart passed on, the company fell to the rear in couples, keeping step, and otherwise assuming the external show of a formal procession. Jack Folinsbee, who had at the outset played a funeral march in dumb show upon an imaginary trombone, desisted, from a lack of sympathy and appreciation, — not having, perhaps, your true humorist's capacity to be content with the enjoyment of his own fun.

The way led through Grizzly Cañon, — by this

time clothed in funereal drapery and shadows. The redwoods, burying their moccasoned feet in the red soil, stood in Indian-file along the track, trailing an uncouth benediction from their bending boughs upon the passing bier. A hare, surprised into helpless inactivity, sat upright and pulsating in the ferns by the roadside, as the *cortége* went by. Squirrels hastened to gain a secure outlook from higher boughs; and the blue-jays, spreading their wings, fluttered before them like outriders, until the outskirts of Sandy Bar were reached, and the solitary cabin of Tennessee's Partner.

Viewed under more favorable circumstances, it would not have been a cheerful place. The unpicturesque site, the rude and unlovely outlines, the unsavory details, which distinguish the nest-building of the California miner, were all here, with the dreariness of decay superadded. A few paces from the cabin there was a rough enclosure, which, in the brief days of Tennessee's Partner's matrimonial felicity, had been used as a garden, but was now overgrown with fern. As we approached it we were surprised to find that what we had taken for a recent attempt at cultivation was the broken soil about an open grave.

The cart was halted before the enclosure; and rejecting the offers of assistance with the same air of simple self-reliance he had displayed throughout, Tennessee's Partner lifted the rough coffin on

his back, and deposited it, unaided, within the shallow grave. He then nailed down the board which served as a lid; and mounting the little mound of earth beside it, took off his hat, and slowly mopped his face with his handkerchief. This the crowd felt was a preliminary to speech; and they disposed themselves variously on stumps and boulders, and sat expectant.

"When a man," began Tennessee's Partner, slowly, "has been running free all day, what's the natural thing for him to do? Why, to come home. And if he ain't in a condition to go home, what can his best friend do? Why, bring him home! And here's Tennessee has been running free, and we brings him home from his wandering." He paused, and picked up a fragment of quartz, rubbed it thoughtfully on his sleeve, and went on: "It ain't the first time that I've packed him on my back, as you see'd me now. It ain't the first time that I brought him to this yer cabin when he could n't help himself; it ain't the first time that I and 'Jinny' have waited for him on yon hill, and picked him up and so fetched him home, when he could n't speak, and did n't know me. And now that it's the last time, why —" he paused, and rubbed the quartz gently on his sleeve — "you see it 's sort of rough on his pardner. And now, gentlemen," he added, abruptly, picking up his long-handled shovel, "the fun'l 's over;

and my thanks, and Tennessee's thanks, to you for your trouble."

Resisting any proffers of assistance, he began to fill in the grave, turning his back upon the crowd, that after a few moments' hesitation gradually withdrew. As they crossed the little ridge that hid Sandy Bar from view, some, looking back, thought they could see Tennessee's Partner, his work done, sitting upon the grave, his shovel between his knees, and his face buried in his red bandanna handkerchief. But it was argued by others that you could n't tell his face from his handkerchief at that distance; and this point remained undecided.

In the reaction that followed the feverish excitement of that day, Tennessee's Partner was not forgotten. A secret investigation had cleared him of any complicity in Tennessee's guilt, and left only a suspicion of his general sanity. Sandy Bar made a point of calling on him, and proffering various uncouth, but well-meant kindnesses. But from that day his rude health and great strength seemed visibly to decline; and when the rainy season fairly set in, and the tiny grass-blades were beginning to peep from the rocky mound above Tennessee's grave, he took to his bed.

One night, when the pines beside the cabin were swaying in the storm, and trailing their

slender fingers over the roof, and the roar and rush of the swollen river were heard below, Tennessee's Partner lifted his head from the pillow, saying, "It is time to go for Tennessee; I must put 'Jinny' in the cart"; and would have risen from his bed but for the restraint of his attendant. Struggling, he still pursued his singular fancy: "There, now, steady, 'Jinny,' — steady, old girl. How dark it is! Look out for the ruts, — and look out for him, too, old gal. Sometimes, you know, when he 's blind drunk, he drops down right in the trail. Keep on straight up to the pine on the top of the hill. Thar — I told you so! — thar he is, — coming this way, too, — all by himself, sober, and his face a-shining. Tennessee! Pardner!"

And so they met.

THE IDYL OF RED GULCH.

SANDY was very drunk. He was lying under an azalea-bush, in pretty much the same attitude in which he had fallen some hours before. How long he had been lying there he could not tell, and did n't care; how long he should lie there was a matter equally indefinite and unconsidered. A tranquil philosophy, born of his physical condition, suffused and saturated his moral being.

The spectacle of a drunken man, and of this drunken man in particular, was not, I grieve to say, of sufficient novelty in Red Gulch to attract attention. Earlier in the day some local satirist had erected a temporary tombstone at Sandy's head, bearing the inscription, "Effects of McCorkle's whiskey, — kills at forty rods," with a hand pointing to McCorkle's saloon. But this, I imagine, was, like most local satire, personal; and was a reflection upon the unfairness of the process rather than a commentary upon the impropriety of the result. With this facetious exception, Sandy had been undisturbed. A wandering mule, released from his pack, had cropped the scant herbage be-

side him, and sniffed curiously at the prostrate man; a vagabond dog, with that deep sympathy which the species have for drunken men, had licked his dusty boots, and curled himself up at his feet, and lay there, blinking one eye in the sunlight, with a simulation of dissipation that was ingenious and dog-like in its implied flattery of the unconscious man beside him.

Meanwhile the shadows of the pine-trees had slowly swung around until they crossed the road, and their trunks barred the open meadow with gigantic parallels of black and yellow. Little puffs of red dust, lifted by the plunging hoofs of passing teams, dispersed in a grimy shower upon the recumbent man. The sun sank lower and lower; and still Sandy stirred not. And then the repose of this philosopher was disturbed, as other philosophers have been, by the intrusion of an unphilosophical sex.

"Miss Mary," as she was known to the little flock that she had just dismissed from the log school-house beyond the pines, was taking her afternoon walk. Observing an unusually fine cluster of blossoms on the azalea-bush opposite, she crossed the road to pluck it, — picking her way through the red dust, not without certain fierce little shivers of disgust, and some feline circumlocution. And then she came suddenly upon Sandy!

Of course she uttered the little *staccato* cry of

her sex. But when she had paid that tribute to her physical weakness she became overbold, and halted for a moment, — at least six feet from this prostrate monster, — with her white skirts gathered in her hand, ready for flight. But neither sound nor motion came from the bush. With one little foot she then overturned the satirical head-board, and muttered "Beasts!" — an epithet which probably, at that moment, conveniently classified in her mind the entire male population of Red Gulch. For Miss Mary, being possessed of certain rigid notions of her own, had not, perhaps, properly appreciated the demonstrative gallantry for which the Californian has been so justly celebrated by his brother Californians, and had, as a new-comer, perhaps, fairly earned the reputation of being "stuck up."

As she stood there she noticed, also, that the slant sunbeams were heating Sandy's head to what she judged to be an unhealthy temperature, and that his hat was lying uselessly at his side. To pick it up and to place it over his face was a work requiring some courage, particularly as his eyes were open. Yet she did it and made good her retreat. But she was somewhat concerned, on looking back, to see that the hat was removed, and that Sandy was sitting up and saying something.

The truth was, that in the calm depths of Sandy's mind he was satisfied that the rays of the

sun were beneficial and healthful; that from childhood he had objected to lying down in a hat; that no people but condemned fools, past redemption, ever wore hats; and that his right to dispense with them when he pleased was inalienable. This was the statement of his inner consciousness. Unfortunately, its outward expression was vague, being limited to a repetition of the following formula,—"Su'shine all ri'! Wasser maär, eh? Wass up, su'shine?"

Miss Mary stopped, and, taking fresh courage from her vantage of distance, asked him if there was anything that he wanted.

"Wass up? Wasser maär?" continued Sandy, in a very high key.

"Get up, you horrid man!" said Miss Mary, now thoroughly incensed; "get up, and go home."

Sandy staggered to his feet. He was six feet high, and Miss Mary trembled. He started forward a few paces and then stopped.

"Wass I go home for?" he suddenly asked, with great gravity.

"Go and take a bath," replied Miss Mary, eying his grimy person with great disfavor.

To her infinite dismay, Sandy suddenly pulled off his coat and vest, threw them on the ground, kicked off his boots, and, plunging wildly forward, darted headlong over the hill, in the direction of the river.

"Goodness Heavens! — the man will be drowned!" said Miss Mary; and then, with feminine inconsistency, she ran back to the schoolhouse, and locked herself in.

That night, while seated at supper with her hostess, the blacksmith's wife, it came to Miss Mary to ask, demurely, if her husband ever got drunk. "Abner," responded Mrs. Stidger, reflectively, "let 's see: Abner has n't been tight since last 'lection." Miss Mary would have liked to ask if he preferred lying in the sun on these occasions, and if a cold bath would have hurt him; but this would have involved an explanation, which she did not then care to give. So she contented herself with opening her gray eyes widely at the red-cheeked Mrs. Stidger, — a fine specimen of Southwestern efflorescence, — and then dismissed the subject altogether. The next day she wrote to her dearest friend, in Boston: "I think I find the intoxicated portion of this community the least objectionable. I refer, my dear, to the men, of course. I do not know anything that could make the women tolerable."

In less than a week Miss Mary had forgotten this episode, except that her afternoon walks took thereafter, almost unconsciously, another direction. She noticed, however, that every morning a fresh cluster of azalea-blossoms appeared among the flowers on her desk. This was not

strange, as her little flock were aware of her fondness for flowers, and invariably kept her desk bright with anemones, syringas, and lupines; but, on questioning them, they, one and all, professed ignorance of the azaleas. A few days later, Master Johnny Stidger, whose desk was nearest to the window, was suddenly taken with spasms of apparently gratuitous laughter, that threatened the discipline of the school. All that Miss Mary could get from him was, that some one had been "looking in the winder." Irate and indignant, she sallied from her hive to do battle with the intruder. As she turned the corner of the school-house, she came plump upon the quondam drunkard, — now perfectly sober, and inexpressibly sheepish and guilty-looking.

These facts Miss Mary was not slow to take a feminine advantage of, in her present humor. But it was somewhat confusing to observe, also, that the beast, despite some faint signs of past dissipation, was amiable-looking, — in fact, a kind of blond Samson, whose corn-colored, silken beard apparently had never yet known the touch of barber's razor or Delilah's shears. So that the cutting speech which quivered on her ready tongue died upon her lips, and she contented herself with receiving his stammering apology with supercilious eyelids and the gathered skirts of uncontamination. When she re-entered the school-room,

her eyes fell upon the azaleas with a new sense of revelation. And then she laughed, and the little people all laughed, and they were all unconsciously very happy.

It was on a hot day — and not long after this — that two short-legged boys came to grief on the threshold of the school with a pail of water, which they had laboriously brought from the spring, and that Miss Mary compassionately seized the pail and started for the spring herself. At the foot of the hill a shadow crossed her path, and a blue-shirted arm dexterously, but gently relieved her of her burden. Miss Mary was both embarrassed and angry. "If you carried more of that for yourself," she said, spitefully, to the blue arm, without deigning to raise her lashes to its owner, "you'd do better." In the submissive silence that followed she regretted the speech, and thanked him so sweetly at the door that he stumbled. Which caused the children to laugh again, — a laugh in which Miss Mary joined, until the color came faintly into her pale cheek. The next day a barrel was mysteriously placed beside the door, and as mysteriously filled with fresh spring-water every morning.

Nor was this superior young person without other quiet attentions. "Profane Bill," driver of the Slumgullion Stage, widely known in the newspapers for his "gallantry" in invariably of-

fering the box-seat to the fair sex, had excepted Miss Mary from this attention, on the ground that he had a habit of "cussin' on up grades," and gave her half the coach to herself. Jack Hamlin, a gambler, having once silently ridden with her in the same coach, afterward threw a decanter at the head of a confederate for mentioning her name in a bar-room. The over-dressed mother of a pupil whose paternity was doubtful had often lingered near this astute Vestal's temple, never daring to enter its sacred precincts, but content to worship the priestess from afar.

With such unconscious intervals the monotonous procession of blue skies, glittering sunshine, brief twilights, and starlit nights passed over Red Gulch. Miss Mary grew fond of walking in the sedate and proper woods. Perhaps she believed, with Mrs. Stidger, that the balsamic odors of the firs "did her chest good," for certainly her slight cough was less frequent and her step was firmer; perhaps she had learned the unending lesson which the patient pines are never weary of repeating to heedful or listless ears. And so, one day, she planned a picnic on Buckeye Hill, and took the children with her. Away from the dusty road, the straggling shanties, the yellow ditches, the clamor of restless engines, the cheap finery of shop-windows, the deeper glitter of paint and colored glass, and the thin veneering which barbarism

takes upon itself in such localities, — what infinite relief was theirs! The last heap of ragged rock and clay passed, the last unsightly chasm crossed, — how the waiting woods opened their long files to receive them! How the children — perhaps because they had not yet grown quite away from the breast of the bounteous Mother — threw themselves face downward on her brown bosom with uncouth caresses, filling the air with their laughter; and how Miss Mary herself — felinely fastidious and intrenched as she was in the purity of spotless skirts, collar, and cuffs — forgot all, and ran like a crested quail at the head of her brood, until, romping, laughing, and panting, with a loosened braid of brown hair, a hat hanging by a knotted ribbon from her throat, she came suddenly and violently, in the heart of the forest, upon — the luckless Sandy!

The explanations, apologies, and not overwise conversation that ensued, need not be indicated here. It would seem, however, that Miss Mary had already established some acquaintance with this ex-drunkard. Enough that he was soon accepted as one of the party; that the children, with that quick intelligence which Providence gives the helpless, recognized a friend, and played with his blond beard, and long silken mustache, and took other liberties, — as the helpless are apt to do. And when he had built a fire against a tree, and

had shown them other mysteries of wood-craft, their admiration knew no bounds. At the close of two such foolish, idle, happy hours he found himself lying at the feet of the schoolmistress, gazing dreamily in her face, as she sat upon the sloping hillside, weaving wreaths of laurel and syringa, in very much the same attitude as he had lain when first they met. Nor was the similitude greatly forced. The weakness of an easy, sensuous nature, that had found a dreamy exaltation in liquor, it is to be feared was now finding an equal intoxication in love.

I think that Sandy was dimly conscious of this himself. I know that he longed to be doing something, — slaying a grizzly, scalping a savage, or sacrificing himself in some way for the sake of this sallow-faced, gray-eyed schoolmistress. As I should like to present him in a heroic attitude, I stay my hand with great difficulty at this moment, being only withheld from introducing such an episode by a strong conviction that it does not usually occur at such times. And I trust that my fairest reader, who remembers that, in a real crisis, it is always some uninteresting stranger or unromantic policeman, and not Adolphus, who rescues, will forgive the omission.

So they sat there, undisturbed, — the woodpeckers chattering overhead, and the voices of the children coming pleasantly from the hollow below.

What they said matters little. What they thought — which might have been interesting — did not transpire. The woodpeckers only learned how Miss Mary was an orphan; how she left her uncle's house, to come to California, for the sake of health and independence; how Sandy was an orphan, too; how he came to California for excitement; how he had lived a wild life, and how he was trying to reform; and other details, which, from a woodpecker's view-point, undoubtedly must have seemed stupid, and a waste of time. But even in such trifles was the afternoon spent; and when the children were again gathered, and Sandy, with a delicacy which the schoolmistress well understood, took leave of them quietly at the outskirts of the settlement, it had seemed the shortest day of her weary life.

As the long, dry summer withered to its roots, the school term of Red Gulch — to use a local euphuism — "dried up" also. In another day Miss Mary would be free; and for a season, at least, Red Gulch would know her no more. She was seated alone in the school-house, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes half closed in one of those day-dreams in which Miss Mary — I fear, to the danger of school discipline — was lately in the habit of indulging. Her lap was full of mosses, ferns, and other woodland memories. She was so preoccupied with these and her own

thoughts that a gentle tapping at the door passed unheard, or translated itself into the remembrance of far-off woodpeckers. When at last it asserted itself more distinctly, she started up with a flushed cheek and opened the door. On the threshold stood a woman, the self-assertion and audacity of whose dress were in singular contrast to her timid, irresolute bearing.

Miss Mary recognized at a glance the dubious mother of her anonymous pupil. Perhaps she was disappointed, perhaps she was only fastidious; but as she coldly invited her to enter, she half unconsciously settled her white cuffs and collar, and gathered closer her own chaste skirts. It was, perhaps, for this reason that the embarrassed stranger, after a moment's hesitation, left her gorgeous parasol open and sticking in the dust beside the door, and then sat down at the farther end of a long bench. Her voice was husky as she began: —

"I heerd tell that you were goin' down to the Bay to-morrow, and I could n't let you go until I came to thank you for your kindness to my Tommy."

Tommy, Miss Mary said, was a good boy, and deserved more than the poor attention she could give him.

"Thank you, miss; thank ye!" cried the stranger, brightening even through the color which

Red Gulch knew facetiously as her "war paint," and striving, in her embarrassment, to drag the long bench nearer the schoolmistress. "I thank you, miss, for that! and if I am his mother, there ain't a sweeter, dearer, better boy lives than him. And if I ain't much as says it, thar ain't a sweeter, dearer, angeler teacher lives than he 's got."

Miss Mary, sitting primly behind her desk, with a ruler over her shoulder, opened her gray eyes widely at this, but said nothing.

"It ain't for you to be complimented by the like of me, I know," she went on, hurriedly. "It ain't for me to be comin' here, in broad day, to do it, either; but I come to ask a favor, — not for me, miss, — not for me, but for the darling boy."

Encouraged by a look in the young schoolmistress's eye, and putting her lilac-gloved hands together, the fingers downward, between her knees, she went on, in a low voice: —

"You see, miss, there 's no one the boy has any claim on but me, and I ain't the proper person to bring him up. I thought some, last year, of sending him away to 'Frisco to school, but when they talked of bringing a schoolma'am here, I waited till I saw you, and then I knew it was all right, and I could keep my boy a little longer. And O, miss, he loves you so much; and if you could hear him talk about you, in his pretty way, and if

he could ask you what I ask you now, you could n't refuse him.

"It is natural," she went on, rapidly, in a voice that trembled strangely between pride and humility, — "it 's natural that he should take to you, miss, for his father, when I first knew him, was a gentleman, — and the boy must forget me, sooner or later, — and so I ain't a goin' to cry about that. For I come to ask you to take my Tommy, — God bless him for the bestest, sweetest boy that lives, — to — to — take him with you."

She had risen and caught the young girl's hand in her own, and had fallen on her knees beside her.

"I 've money plenty, and it 's all yours and his. Put him in some good school, where you can go and see him, and help him to — to — to forget his mother. Do with him what you like. The worst you can do will be kindness to what he will learn with me. Only take him out of this wicked life, this cruel place, this home of shame and sorrow. You will; I know you will, — won't you? You will, — you must not, you cannot say no! You will make him as pure, as gentle as yourself; and when he has grown up, you will tell him his father's name, — the name that has n't passed my lips for years, — the name of Alexander Morton, whom they call here Sandy! Miss Mary! — do not take your hand away! Miss Mary, speak to me! You will take my boy? Do not put your

face from me. I know it ought not to look on such as me. Miss Mary! — my God, be merciful! — she is leaving me!"

Miss Mary had risen, and, in the gathering twilight, had felt her way to the open window. She stood there, leaning against the casement, her eyes fixed on the last rosy tints that were fading from the western sky. There was still some of its light on her pure young forehead, on her white collar, on her clasped white hands, but all fading slowly away. The suppliant had dragged herself, still on her knees, beside her.

"I know it takes time to consider. I will wait here all night; but I cannot go until you speak. Do not deny me now. You will! — I see it in your sweet face, — such a face as I have seen in my dreams. I see it in your eyes, Miss Mary! — you will take my boy!"

The last red beam crept higher, suffused Miss Mary's eyes with something of its glory, flickered, and faded, and went out. The sun had set on Red Gulch. In the twilight and silence Miss Mary's voice sounded pleasantly.

"I will take the boy. Send him to me to-night."

The happy mother raised the hem of Miss Mary's skirts to her lips. She would have buried her hot face in its virgin folds, but she dared not. She rose to her feet.

"Does — this man — know of your intention?" asked Miss Mary, suddenly.

"No, nor cares. He has never even seen the child to know it."

"Go to him at once, — to-night, — now! Tell him what you have done. Tell him I have taken his child, and tell him — he must never see — see — the child again. Wherever it may be, he must not come; wherever I may take it, he must not follow! There, go now, please, — I 'm weary, and — have much yet to do!"

They walked together to the door. On the threshold the woman turned.

"Good night."

She would have fallen at Miss Mary's feet. But at the same moment the young girl reached out her arms, caught the sinful woman to her own pure breast for one brief moment, and then closed and locked the door.

It was with a sudden sense of great responsibility that Profane Bill took the reins of the Slumgullion Stage the next morning, for the schoolmistress was one of his passengers. As he entered the high-road, in obedience to a pleasant voice from the "inside," he suddenly reined up his horses and respectfully waited, as "Tommy" hopped out at the command of Miss Mary.

"Not that bush, Tommy, — the next."

Tommy whipped out his new pocket-knife, and, cutting a branch from a tall azalea-bush, returned with it to Miss Mary.

"All right now?"

"All right."

And the stage-door closed on the Idyl of Red Gulch.

BROWN OF CALAVERAS.

A SUBDUED tone of conversation, and the absence of cigar-smoke and boot-heels at the windows of the Wingdam stage-coach, made it evident that one of the inside passengers was a woman. A disposition on the part of loungers at the stations to congregate before the window, and some concern in regard to the appearance of coats, hats, and collars, further indicated that she was lovely. All of which Mr. Jack Hamlin, on the box-seat, noted with the smile of cynical philosophy. Not that he depreciated the sex, but that he recognized therein a deceitful element, the pursuit of which sometimes drew mankind away from the equally uncertain blandishments of poker, — of which it may be remarked that Mr. Hamlin was a professional exponent.

So that, when he placed his narrow boot on the wheel and leaped down, he did not even glance at the window from which a green veil was fluttering, but lounged up and down with that listless and grave indifference of his class, which was, perhaps, the next thing to good-breeding. With his closely buttoned figure and self-contained air he

was a marked contrast to the other passengers, with their feverish restlessness, and boisterous emotion; and even Bill Masters, a graduate of Harvard, with his slovenly dress, his overflowing vitality, his intense appreciation of lawlessness and barbarism, and his mouth filled with crackers and cheese, I fear cut but an unromantic figure beside this lonely calculator of chances, with his pale Greek face and Homeric gravity.

The driver called "All aboard!" and Mr. Hamlin returned to the coach. His foot was upon the wheel, and his face raised to the level of the open window, when, at the same moment, what appeared to him to be the finest eyes in the world suddenly met his. He quietly dropped down again, addressed a few words to one of the inside passengers, effected an exchange of seats, and as quietly took his place inside. Mr. Hamlin never allowed his philosophy to interfere with decisive and prompt action.

I fear that this irruption of Jack cast some restraint upon the other passengers, — particularly those who were making themselves most agreeable to the lady. One of them leaned forward, and apparently conveyed to her information regarding Mr. Hamlin's profession in a single epithet. Whether Mr. Hamlin heard it, or whether he recognized in the informant a distinguished jurist, from whom, but a few evenings before, he had won

several thousand dollars, I cannot say. His colorless face betrayed no sign; his black eyes, quietly observant, glanced indifferently past the legal gentleman, and rested on the much more pleasing features of his neighbor. An Indian stoicism — said to be an inheritance from his maternal ancestor — stood him in good service, until the rolling wheels rattled upon the river-gravel at Scott's Ferry, and the stage drew up at the International Hotel for dinner. The legal gentleman and a member of Congress leaped out, and stood ready to assist the descending goddess, while Colonel Starbottle, of Siskiyou, took charge of her parasol and shawl. In this multiplicity of attention there was a momentary confusion and delay. Jack Hamlin quietly opened the *opposite* door of the coach, took the lady's hand, — with that decision and positiveness which a hesitating and undecided sex know how to admire, — and in an instant had dexterously and gracefully swung her to the ground, and again lifted her to the platform. An audible chuckle on the box, I fear, came from that other cynic, "Yuba Bill," the driver. "Look keerfully arter that baggage, Kernel," said the expressman, with affected concern, as he looked after Colonel Starbottle, gloomily bringing up the rear of the triumphant procession to the waiting-room.

Mr. Hamlin did not stay for dinner. His horse was already saddled, and awaiting him. He dashed

over the ford, up the gravelly hill, and out into the dusty perspective of the Wingdam road, like one leaving an unpleasant fancy behind him. The inmates of dusty cabins by the roadside shaded their eyes with their hands, and looked after him, recognizing the man by his horse, and speculating what "was up with Comanche Jack." Yet much of this interest centred in the horse, in a community where the time made by "French Pete's" mare, in his run from the Sheriff of Calaveras, eclipsed all concern in the ultimate fate of that worthy.

The sweating flanks of his gray at length recalled him to himself. He checked his speed, and, turning into a by-road, sometimes used as a cut-off, trotted leisurely along, the reins hanging listlessly from his fingers. As he rode on, the character of the landscape changed, and became more pastoral. Openings in groves of pine and sycamore disclosed some rude attempts at cultivation, — a flowering vine trailed over the porch of one cabin, and a woman rocked her cradled babe under the roses of another. A little farther on Mr. Hamlin came upon some barelegged children, wading in the willowy creek, and so wrought upon them with a badinage peculiar to himself, that they were emboldened to climb up his horse's legs and over his saddle, until he was fain to develop an exaggerated ferocity of demeanor, and to

escape, leaving behind some kisses and coin. And then, advancing deeper into the woods, where all signs of habitation failed, he began to sing, — uplifting a tenor so singularly sweet, and shaded by a pathos so subduing and tender, that I wot the robins and linnets stopped to listen. Mr. Hamlin's voice was not cultivated; the subject of his song was some sentimental lunacy, borrowed from the negro minstrels; but there thrilled through all some occult quality of tone and expression that was unspeakably touching. Indeed, it was a wonderful sight to see this sentimental blackleg, with a pack of cards in his pocket and a revolver at his back, sending his voice before him through the dim woods with a plaint about his "Nelly's grave," in a way that overflowed the eyes of the listener. A sparrow-hawk, fresh from his sixth victim, possibly recognizing in Mr. Hamlin a kindred spirit, stared at him in surprise, and was fain to confess the superiority of man. With a superior predatory capacity, *he* could n't sing.

But Mr. Hamlin presently found himself again on the high-road, and at his former pace. Ditches and banks of gravel, denuded hillsides, stumps, and decayed trunks of trees, took the place of woodland and ravine, and indicated his approach to civilization. Then a church-steeple came in sight, and he knew that he had reached home. In a few moments he was clattering down the

single narrow street, that lost itself in a chaotic ruin of races, ditches, and tailings at the foot of the hill, and dismounted before the gilded windows of the "Magnolia" saloon. Passing through the long bar-room, he pushed open a green-baize door, entered a dark passage, opened another door with a pass-key, and found himself in a dimly lighted room, whose furniture, though elegant and costly for the locality, showed signs of abuse. The inlaid centre-table was overlaid with stained disks that were not contemplated in the original design. The embroidered arm-chairs were discolored, and the green velvet lounge, on which Mr. Hamlin threw himself, was soiled at the foot with the red soil of Wingdam.

Mr. Hamlin did not sing in his cage. He lay still, looking at a highly colored painting above him, representing a young creature of opulent charms. It occurred to him then, for the first time, that he had never seen exactly that kind of a woman, and that, if he should, he would not, probably, fall in love with her. Perhaps he was thinking of another style of beauty. But just then some one knocked at the door. Without rising, he pulled a cord that apparently shot back a bolt, for the door swung open, and a man entered.

The new-comer was broad-shouldered and robust, — a vigor not borne out in the face, which, though handsome, was singularly weak, and dis-

figured by dissipation. He appeared to be also under the influence of liquor, for he started on seeing Mr. Hamlin, and said, "I thought Kate was here"; stammered, and seemed confused and embarrassed.

Mr. Hamlin smiled the smile which he had before worn on the Wingdam coach, and sat up, quite refreshed and ready for business.

"You did n't come up on the stage," continued the new-comer, "did you?"

"No," replied Hamlin; "I left it at Scott's Ferry. It is n't due for half an hour yet. But how 's luck, Brown?"

"D—— bad," said Brown, his face suddenly assuming an expression of weak despair; "I 'm cleaned out again. Jack," he continued, in a whining tone, that formed a pitiable contrast to his bulky figure, "can't you help me with a hundred till to-morrow's clean-up? You see I 've got to send money home to the old woman, and — you 've won twenty times that amount from me."

The conclusion was, perhaps, not entirely logical, but Jack overlooked it, and handed the sum to his visitor. "The old woman business is about played out, Brown," he added, by way of commentary; "why don't you say you want to buck agin' faro? You know you ain't married!"

"Fact, sir," said Brown, with a sudden gravity,

as if the mere contact of the gold with the palm of the hand had imparted some dignity to his frame. "I 've got a wife — a d—— good one, too, if I do say it — in the States. It 's three year since I 've seen her, and a year since I 've writ to her. When things is about straight, and we get down to the lead, I 'm going to send for her."

"And Kate?" queried Mr. Hamlin, with his previous smile.

Mr. Brown, of Calaveras, essayed an archness of glance, to cover his confusion, which his weak face and whiskey-muddled intellect but poorly carried out, and said, —

"D—— it, Jack, a man must have a little liberty, you know. But come, what do you say to a little game? Give us a show to double this hundred."

Jack Hamlin looked curiously at his fatuous friend. Perhaps he knew that the man was predestined to lose the money, and preferred that it should flow back into his own coffers rather than any other. He nodded his head, and drew his chair toward the table. At the same moment there came a rap upon the door.

"It 's Kate," said Mr. Brown.

Mr. Hamlin shot back the bolt, and the door opened. But, for the first time in his life, he staggered to his feet, utterly unnerved and abashed,

and for the first time in his life the hot blood crimsoned his colorless cheeks to his forehead. For before him stood the lady he had lifted from the Wingdam coach, whom Brown — dropping his cards with a hysterical laugh — greeted as

"My old woman, by thunder!"

They say that Mrs. Brown burst into tears, and reproaches of her husband. I saw her, in 1857, at Marysville, and disbelieve the story. And the Wingdam Chronicle, of the next week, under the head of "Touching Reunion," said: "One of those beautiful and touching incidents, peculiar to California life, occurred last week in our city. The wife of one of Wingdam's eminent pioneers, tired of the effete civilization of the East and its inhospitable climate, resolved to join her noble husband upon these golden shores. Without informing him of her intention, she undertook the long journey, and arrived last week. The joy of the husband may be easier imagined than described. The meeting is said to have been indescribably affecting. We trust her example may be followed."

Whether owing to Mrs. Brown's influence, or to some more successful speculations, Mr. Brown's financial fortune from that day steadily improved. He bought out his partners in the "Nip and Tuck" lead, with money which was said to have been won

at poker, a week or two after his wife's arrival, but which rumor, adopting Mrs. Brown's theory that Brown had forsworn the gaming-table, declared to have been furnished by Mr. Jack Hamlin. He built and furnished the "Wingdam House," which pretty Mrs. Brown's great popularity kept overflowing with guests. He was elected to the Assembly, and gave largess to churches. A street in Wingdam was named in his honor.

Yet it was noted that in proportion as he waxed wealthy and fortunate, he grew pale, thin, and anxious. As his wife's popularity increased, he became fretful and impatient. The most uxorious of husbands, he was absurdly jealous. If he did not interfere with his wife's social liberty, it was because it was maliciously whispered that his first and only attempt was met by an outburst from Mrs. Brown that terrified him into silence. Much of this kind of gossip came from those of her own sex whom she had supplanted in the chivalrous attentions of Wingdam, which, like most popular chivalry, was devoted to an admiration of power, whether of masculine force or feminine beauty. It should be remembered, too, in her extenuation, that, since her arrival, she had been the unconscious priestess of a mythological worship, perhaps not more ennobling to her womanhood than that which distinguished an older Greek democracy. I think that Brown was dimly con-

scious of this. But his only confidant was Jack Hamlin, whose *infelix* reputation naturally precluded any open intimacy with the family, and whose visits were infrequent.

It was midsummer, and a moonlit night; and Mrs. Brown, very rosy, large-eyed, and pretty, sat upon the piazza, enjoying the fresh incense of the mountain breeze, and, it is to be feared, another incense which was not so fresh, nor quite as innocent. Beside her sat Colonel Starbottle and Judge Boompointer, and a later addition to her court, in the shape of a foreign tourist. She was in good spirits.

"What do you see down the road?" inquired the gallant Colonel, who had been conscious, for the last few minutes, that Mrs. Brown's attention was diverted.

"Dust," said Mrs. Brown, with a sigh. "Only Sister Anne's 'flock of sheep.'"

The Colonel, whose literary recollections did not extend farther back than last week's paper, took a more practical view. "It ain't sheep," he continued; "it 's a horseman. Judge, ain't that Jack Hamlin's gray?"

But the Judge did n't know; and, as Mrs. Brown suggested the air was growing too cold for further investigations, they retired to the parlor.

Mr. Brown was in the stable, where he generally retired after dinner. Perhaps it was to show

his contempt for his wife's companions; perhaps like other weak natures, he found pleasure in the exercise of absolute power over inferior animals. He had a certain gratification in the training of a chestnut mare, whom he could beat or caress as pleased him, which he could n't do with Mrs. Brown. It was here that he recognized a certain gray horse which had just come in, and, looking a little farther on, found his rider. Brown's greeting was cordial and hearty; Mr. Hamlin's somewhat restrained. But at Brown's urgent request, he followed him up the back stairs to a narrow corridor, and thence to a small room looking out upon the stable-yard. It was plainly furnished with a bed, a table, a few chairs, and a rack for guns and whips.

"This yer 's my home, Jack," said Brown, with a sigh, as he threw himself upon the bed, and motioned his companion to a chair. "Her room 's t' other end of the hall. It 's more 'n six months since we 've lived together, or met, except at meals. It 's mighty rough papers on the head of the house, ain't it?" he said, with a forced laugh. "But I 'm glad to see you, Jack, d—— glad," and he reached from the bed, and again shook the unresponsive hand of Jack Hamlin.

"I brought ye up here, for I did n't want to talk in the stable; though, for the matter of that, it 's all round town. Don't strike a light. We

can talk here in the moonshine. Put up your feet on that winder, and sit here beside me. Thar 's whiskey in that jug."

Mr. Hamlin did not avail himself of the information. Brown, of Calaveras, turned his face to the wall, and continued: —

"If I did n't love the woman, Jack, I would n't mind. But it 's loving her, and seeing her, day arter day, goin' on at this rate, and no one to put down the brake; that 's what gits me! But I 'm glad to see ye, Jack, d—— glad."

In the darkness he groped about until he had found and wrung his companion's hand again. He would have detained it, but Jack slipped it into the buttoned breast of his coat, and asked, listlessly, "How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since she came here; ever since the day she walked into the Magnolia. I was a fool then; Jack, I 'm a fool now; but I did n't know how much I loved her till then. And she has n't been the same woman since.

"But that ain't all, Jack; and it 's what I wanted to see you about, and I 'm glad you 've come. It ain't that she does n't love me any more; it ain't that she fools with every chap that comes along, for, perhaps, I staked her love and lost it, as I did everything else at the Magnolia; and, perhaps, foolin' is nateral to some women, and thar ain't no great harm done, 'cept

to the fools. But, Jack, I think, — I think she loves somebody else. Don't move, Jack; don't move; if your pistol hurts ye, take it off.

"It 's been more 'n six months now that she 's seemed unhappy and lonesome, and kinder nervous and scared like. And sometimes I 've ketched her lookin' at me sort of timid and pitying. And she writes to somebody. And for the last week she 's been gathering her own things, — trinkets, and furbelows, and jew'lry, — and, Jack, I think she 's goin' off. I could stand all but that. To have her steal away like a thief — " He put his face downward to the pillow, and for a few moments there was no sound but the ticking of a clock on the mantel. Mr. Hamlin lit a cigar, and moved to the open window. The moon no longer shone into the room, and the bed and its occupant were in shadow. "What shall I do, Jack?" said the voice from the darkness.

The answer came promptly and clearly from the window-side, — "Spot the man, and kill him on sight."

"But, Jack?"

"He 's took the risk!"

"But will that bring *her* back?"

Jack did not reply, but moved from the window towards the door.

"Don't go yet, Jack; light the candle, and sit by the table. It 's a comfort to see ye, if nothin else."

Jack hesitated, and then complied. He drew a pack of cards from his pocket and shuffled them, glancing at the bed. But Brown's face was turned to the wall. When Mr. Hamlin had shuffled the cards, he cut them, and dealt one card on the opposite side of the table and towards the bed, and another on his side of the table for himself. The first was a deuce; his own card, a king. He then shuffled and cut again. This time "dummy" had a queen, and himself a four-spot. Jack brightened up for the third deal. It brought his adversary a deuce, and himself a king again. "Two out of three," said Jack, audibly.

"What 's that, Jack?" said Brown.

"Nothing."

Then Jack tried his hand with dice; but he always threw sixes, and his imaginary opponent aces. The force of habit is sometimes confusing.

Meanwhile, some magnetic influence in Mr. Hamlin's presence, or the anodyne of liquor, or both, brought surcease of sorrow, and Brown slept. Mr. Hamlin moved his chair to the window, and looked out on the town of Wingdam, now sleeping peacefully, — its harsh outlines softened and subdued, its glaring colors mellowed and sobered in the moonlight that flowed over all. In the hush he could hear the gurgling of water in the ditches, and the sighing of the pines beyond the hill.

Then he looked up at the firmament, and as he did so a star shot across the twinkling field. Presently another, and then another. The phenomenon suggested to Mr. Hamlin a fresh augury. If in another fifteen minutes another star should fall — He sat there, watch in hand, for twice that time, but the phenomenon was not repeated.

The clock struck two, and Brown still slept. Mr. Hamlin approached the table, and took from his pocket a letter, which he read by the flickering candle-light. It contained only a single line, written in pencil, in a woman's hand, —

"Be at the corral, with the buggy, at three."

The sleeper moved uneasily, and then awoke. "Are you there, Jack?"

"Yes."

"Don't go yet. I dreamed just now, Jack, — dreamed of old times. I thought that Sue and me was being married agin, and that the parson, Jack, was — who do you think? — you!"

The gambler laughed, and seated himself on the bed, — the paper still in his hand.

"It 's a good sign, ain't it?" queried Brown.

"I reckon. Say, old man, had n't you better get up?"

The "old man," thus affectionately appealed to, rose, with the assistance of Hamlin's outstretched hand.

"Smoke?"

Brown mechanically took the proffered cigar.

"Light?"

Jack had twisted the letter into a spiral, lit it, and held it for his companion. He continued to hold it until it was consumed, and dropped the fragment — a fiery star — from the open window. He watched it as it fell, and then returned to his friend.

"Old man," he said, placing his hands upon Brown's shoulders, "in ten minutes I 'll be on the road, and gone like that spark. We won't see each other agin; but, before I go, take a fool's advice: sell out all you 've got, take your wife with you, and quit the country. It ain't no place for you, nor her. Tell her she must go; make her go, if she won't. Don't whine because you can't be a saint, and she ain't an angel. Be a man, — and treat her like a woman. Don't be a d—— fool. Good by."

He tore himself from Brown's grasp, and leaped down the stairs like a deer. At the stable-door he collared the half-sleeping hostler, and backed him against the wall. "Saddle my horse in two minutes, or I 'll — " The ellipsis was frightfully suggestive.

"The missis said you was to have the buggy," stammered the man.

"D——n the buggy!"

The horse was saddled as fast as the nervous

hands of the astounded hostler could manipulate buckle and strap.

"Is anything up, Mr. Hamlin?" said the man, who, like all his class, admired the *élan* of his fiery patron, and was really concerned in his welfare.

"Stand aside!"

The man fell back. With an oath, a bound, and clatter, Jack was into the road. In another moment, to the man's half-awakened eyes, he was but a moving cloud of dust in the distance, towards which a star just loosed from its brethren was trailing a stream of fire.

But early that morning the dwellers by the Wingdam turnpike, miles away, heard a voice, pure as a sky-lark's, singing afield. They who were asleep turned over on their rude couches to dream of youth and love and olden days. Hard-faced men and anxious gold-seekers, already at work, ceased their labors and leaned upon their picks, to listen to a romantic vagabond ambling away against the rosy sunrise.

HIGH-WATER MARK.

WHEN the tide was out on the Dedlow Marsh, its extended dreariness was patent. Its spongy, low-lying surface, sluggish, inky pools, and tortuous sloughs, twisting their slimy way, eel-like, toward the open bay, were all hard facts. So were the few green tussocks, with their scant blades, their amphibious flavor, and unpleasant dampness. And if you choose to indulge your fancy, — although the flat monotony of the Dedlow Marsh was not inspiring, — the wavy line of scattered drift gave an unpleasant consciousness of the spent waters, and made the dead certainty of the returning tide a gloomy reflection, which no present sunshine could dissipate. The greener meadow-land seemed oppressed with this idea, and made no positive attempt at vegetation until the work of reclamation should be complete. In the bitter fruit of the low cranberry-bushes one might fancy he detected a naturally sweet disposition curdled and soured by an injudicious course of too much regular cold water.

The vocal expression of the Dedlow Marsh was also melancholy and depressing. The sepulchral

boom of the bittern, the shriek of the curlew, the scream of passing brent, the wrangling of quarrelsome teal, the sharp, querulous protest of the startled crane, and syllabled complaint of the "killdeer" plover were beyond the power of written expression. Nor was the aspect of these mournful fowls at all cheerful and inspiring. Certainly not the blue peron standing midleg deep in the water, obviously catching cold in a reckless disregard of wet feet and consequences; nor the mournful curlew, the dejected plover, or the low-spirited snipe, who saw fit to join him in his suicidal contemplation; nor the impassive kingfisher — an ornithological Marius — reviewing the desolate expanse; nor the black raven that went to and fro over the face of the marsh continually, but evidently could n't make up his mind whether the waters had subsided, and felt low-spirited in the reflection that, after all this trouble, he would n't be able to give a definite answer. On the contrary, it was evident at a glance that the dreary expanse of Dedlow Marsh told unpleasantly on the birds, and that the season of migration was looked forward to with a feeling of relief and satisfaction by the full-grown, and of extravagant anticipation by the callow, brood. But if Dedlow Marsh was cheerless at the slack of the low tide, you should have seen it when the tide was strong and full. When the damp air blew

chilly over the cold, glittering expanse, and came to the faces of those who looked seaward like another tide; when a steel-like glint marked the low hollows and the sinuous line of slough; when the great shell-incrusted trunks of fallen trees arose again, and went forth on their dreary, purposeless wanderings, drifting hither and thither, but getting no farther toward any goal at the falling tide or the day's decline than the cursed Hebrew in the legend; when the glossy ducks swung silently, making neither ripple nor furrow on the shimmering surface; when the fog came in with the tide and shut out the blue above, even as the green below had been obliterated; when boatmen, lost in that fog, paddling about in a hopeless way, started at what seemed the brushing of mermen's fingers on the boat's keel, or shrank from the tufts of grass spreading around like the floating hair of a corpse, and knew by these signs that they were lost upon Dedlow Marsh, and must make a night of it, and a gloomy one at that, — then you might know something of Dedlow Marsh at high water.

Let me recall a story connected with this latter view which never failed to recur to my mind in my long gunning excursions upon Dedlow Marsh. Although the event was briefly recorded in the county paper, I had the story, in all its eloquent detail, from the lips of the principal actor. I cannot hope to catch the varying emphasis and pecu-

liar coloring of feminine delineation, for my narrator was a woman; but I'll try to give at least its substance.

She lived midway of the great slough of Dedlow Marsh and a good-sized river, which debouched four miles beyond into an estuary formed by the Pacific Ocean, on the long sandy peninsula which constituted the southwestern boundary of a noble bay. The house in which she lived was a small frame cabin raised from the marsh a few feet by stout piles, and was three miles distant from the settlements upon the river. Her husband was a logger, — a profitable business in a county where the principal occupation was the manufacture of lumber.

It was the season of early spring, when her husband left on the ebb of a high tide, with a raft of logs for the usual transportation to the lower end of the bay. As she stood by the door of the little cabin when the voyagers departed she noticed a cold look in the southeastern sky, and she remembered hearing her husband say to his companions that they must endeavor to complete their voyage before the coming of the southwesterly gale which he saw brewing. And that night it began to storm and blow harder than she had ever before experienced, and some great trees fell in the forest by the river, and the house rocked like her baby's cradle.

But however the storm might roar about the little cabin, she knew that one she trusted had driven bolt and bar with his own strong hand, and that had he feared for her he would not have left her. This, and her domestic duties, and the care of her little sickly baby, helped to keep her mind from dwelling on the weather, except, of course, to hope that he was safely harbored with the logs at Utopia in the dreary distance. But she noticed that day, when she went out to feed the chickens and look after the cow, that the tide was up to the little fence of their garden-patch, and the roar of the surf on the south beach, though miles away, she could hear distinctly. And she began to think that she would like to have some one to talk with about matters, and she believed that if it had not been so far and so stormy, and the trail so impassable, she would have taken the baby and have gone over to Ryckman's, her nearest neighbor. But then, you see, he might have returned in the storm, all wet, with no one to see to him; and it was a long exposure for baby, who was croupy and ailing.

But that night, she never could tell why, she did n't feel like sleeping or even lying down. The storm had somewhat abated, but she still "sat and sat," and even tried to read. I don't know whether it was a Bible or some profane magazine that this

poor woman read, but most probably the latter, for the words all ran together and made such sad nonsense that she was forced at last to put the book down and turn to that dearer volume which lay before her in the cradle, with its white initial leaf as yet unsoiled, and try to look forward to its mysterious future. And, rocking the cradle, she thought of everything and everybody, but still was wide awake as ever.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when she at last laid down in her clothes. How long she slept she could not remember, but she awoke with a dreadful choking in her throat, and found herself standing, trembling all over, in the middle of the room, with her baby clasped to her breast, and she was "saying something." The baby cried and sobbed, and she walked up and down trying to hush it, when she heard a scratching at the door. She opened it fearfully, and was glad to see it was only old Pete, their dog, who crawled, dripping with water, into the room. She would like to have looked out, not in the faint hope of her husband's coming, but to see how things looked; but the wind shook the door so savagely that she could hardly hold it. Then she sat down a little while, and then walked up and down a little while, and then she lay down again a little while. Lying close by the wall of the little cabin, she thought she heard once or twice something scrape slowly

against the clapboards, like the scraping of branches. Then there was a little gurgling sound, "like the baby made when it was swallowing"; then something went "click-click" and "cluck-cluck," so that she sat up in bed. When she did so she was attracted by something else that seemed creeping from the back door towards the centre of the room. It was n't much wider than her little finger, but soon it swelled to the width of her hand, and began spreading all over the floor. It was water.

She ran to the front door and threw it wide open, and saw nothing but water. She ran to the back door and threw it open, and saw nothing but water. She ran to the side window, and, throwing that open, she saw nothing but water. Then she remembered hearing her husband once say that there was no danger in the tide, for that fell regularly, and people could calculate on it, and that he would rather live near the bay than the river, whose banks might overflow at any time. But was it the tide? So she ran again to the back door, and threw out a stick of wood. It drifted away towards the bay. She scooped up some of the water and put it eagerly to her lips. It was fresh and sweet. It was the river, and not the tide!

It was then — O, God be praised for his goodness! she did neither faint nor fall; it was then — blessed be the Saviour for it was his merciful

hand that touched and strengthened her in this awful moment — that fear dropped from her like a garment, and her trembling ceased. It was then and thereafter that she never lost her self-command, through all the trials of that gloomy night.

She drew the bedstead towards the middle of the room, and placed a table upon it and on that she put the cradle. The water on the floor was already over her ankles, and the house once or twice moved so perceptibly, and seemed to be racked so, that the closet doors all flew open. Then she heard the same rasping and thumping against the wall, and, looking out, saw that a large uprooted tree, which had lain near the road at the upper end of the pasture, had floated down to the house. Luckily its long roots dragged in the soil and kept it from moving as rapidly as the current, for had it struck the house in its full career, even the strong nails and bolts in the piles could not have withstood the shock. The hound had leaped upon its knotty surface, and crouched near the roots shivering and whining. A ray of hope flashed across her mind. She drew a heavy blanket from the bed, and, wrapping it about the babe, waded in the deepening waters to the door. As the tree swung again, broadside on, making the little cabin creak and tremble, she leaped on to its trunk. By God's mercy she succeeded in obtaining a footing on its slippery surface, and, twining

an arm about its roots, she held in the other her moaning child. Then something cracked near the front porch, and the whole front of the house she had just quitted fell forward, — just as cattle fall on their knees before they lie down, — and at the same moment the great redwood-tree swung round and drifted away with its living cargo into the black night.

For all the excitement and danger, for all her soothing of her crying babe, for all the whistling of the wind, for all the uncertainty of her situation, she still turned to look at the deserted and water-swept cabin. She remembered even then, and she wonders how foolish she was to think of it at that time, that she wished she had put on another dress and the baby's best clothes; and she kept praying that the house would be spared so that he, when he returned, would have something to come to, and it would n't be quite so desolate, and — how could he ever know what had become of her and baby? And at the thought she grew sick and faint. But she had something else to do besides worrying, for whenever the long roots of her ark struck an obstacle, the whole trunk made half a revolution, and twice dipped her in the black water. The hound, who kept distracting her by running up and down the tree and howling, at last fell off at one of these collisions. He swam for some time beside her, and she

tried to get the poor beast upon the tree, but he "acted silly" and wild, and at last she lost sight of him forever. Then she and her baby were left alone. The light which had burned for a few minutes in the deserted cabin was quenched suddenly. She could not then tell whither she was drifting. The outline of the white dunes on the peninsula showed dimly ahead, and she judged the tree was moving in a line with the river. It must be about slack water, and she had probably reached the eddy formed by the confluence of the tide and the overflowing waters of the river. Unless the tide fell soon, there was present danger of her drifting to its channel, and being carried out to sea or crushed in the floating drift. That peril averted, if she were carried out on the ebb toward the bay, she might hope to strike one of the wooded promontories of the peninsula, and rest till daylight. Sometimes she thought she heard voices and shouts from the river, and the bellowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. Then again it was only the ringing in her ears and throbbing of her heart. She found at about this time that she was so chilled and stiffened in her cramped position that she could scarcely move, and the baby cried so when she put it to her breast that she noticed the milk refused to flow; and she was so frightened at that, that she put her head under her shawl, and for the first time cried bitterly.

When she raised her head again, the boom of the surf was behind her, and she knew that her ark had again swung round. She dipped up the water to cool her parched throat, and found that it was salt as her tears. There was a relief, though, for by this sign she knew that she was drifting with the tide. It was then the wind went down, and the great and awful silence oppressed her. There was scarcely a ripple against the furrowed sides of the great trunk on which she rested, and around her all was black gloom and quiet. She spoke to the baby just to hear herself speak, and to know that she had not lost her voice. She thought then, — it was queer, but she could not help thinking it, — how awful must have been the night when the great ship swung over the Asiatic peak, and the sounds of creation were blotted out from the world. She thought, too, of mariners clinging to spars, and of poor women who were lashed to rafts, and beaten to death by the cruel sea. She tried to thank God that she was thus spared, and lifted her eyes from the baby who had fallen into a fretful sleep. Suddenly, away to the southward, a great light lifted itself out of the gloom, and flashed and flickered, and flickered and flashed again. Her heart fluttered quickly against the baby's cold cheek. It was the lighthouse at the entrance of the bay. As she was yet wondering, the tree suddenly rolled a little, dragged a little, and then seemed to lie quiet

and still. She put out her hand and the current gurgled against it. The tree was aground, and, by the position of the light and the noise of the surf, aground upon the Dedlow Marsh.

Had it not been for her baby, who was ailing and croupy, had it not been for the sudden drying up of that sensitive fountain, she would have felt safe and relieved. Perhaps it was this which tended to make all her impressions mournful and gloomy. As the tide rapidly fell, a great flock of black brent fluttered by her, screaming and crying. Then the plover flew up and piped mournfully, as they wheeled around the trunk, and at last fearlessly lit upon it like a gray cloud. Then the heron flew over and around her, shrieking and protesting, and at last dropped its gaunt legs only a few yards from her. But, strangest of all, a pretty white bird, larger than a dove, — like a pelican, but not a pelican, — circled around and around her. At last it lit upon a rootlet of the tree, quite over her shoulder. She put out her hand and stroked its beautiful white neck, and it never appeared to move. It stayed there so long that she thought she would lift up the baby to see it, and try to attract her attention. But when she did so, the child was so chilled and cold, and had such a blue look under the little lashes which it did n't raise at all, that she screamed aloud, and the bird flew away, and she fainted.

Well, that was the worst of it, and perhaps it was not so much, after all, to any but herself. For when she recovered her senses it was bright sunlight, and dead low water. There was a confused noise of guttural voices about her, and an old squaw, singing an Indian "hushaby," and rocking herself from side to side before a fire built on the marsh, before which she, the recovered wife and mother, lay weak and weary. Her first thought was for her baby, and she was about to speak, when a young squaw, who must have been a mother herself, fathomed her thought and brought her the "mowitch," pale but living, in such a queer little willow cradle all bound up, just like the squaw's own young one, that she laughed and cried together, and the young squaw and the old squaw showed their big white teeth and glinted their black eyes and said, "Plenty get well, skeena mowitch," "wagee man come plenty soon," and she could have kissed their brown faces in her joy. And then she found that they had been gathering berries on the marsh in their queer, comical baskets, and saw the skirt of her gown fluttering on the tree from afar, and the old squaw could n't resist the temptation of procuring a new garment, and came down and discovered the "wagee" woman and child. And of course she gave the garment to the old squaw, as you may imagine, and when *he* came at last and rushed up to her,

looking about ten years older in his anxiety, she felt so faint again that they had to carry her to the canoe. For, you see, he knew nothing about the flood until he met the Indians at Utopia, and knew by the signs that the poor woman was his wife. And at the next high-tide he towed the tree away back home, although it was n't worth the trouble, and built another house, using the old tree for the foundation and props, and called it after her, "Mary's Ark!" But you may guess the next house was built above High-water mark. And that 's all.

Not much, perhaps, considering the malevolent capacity of the Dedlow Marsh. But you must tramp over it at low water, or paddle over it at high tide, or get lost upon it once or twice in the fog, as I have, to understand properly Mary's adventure, or to appreciate duly the blessings of living beyond High-Water Mark.

A LONELY RIDE.

AS I stepped into the Slumgullion stage I saw that it was a dark night, a lonely road, and that I was the only passenger. Let me assure the reader that I have no ulterior design in making this assertion. A long course of light reading has forewarned me what every experienced intelligence must confidently look for from such a statement. The story-teller who wilfully tempts Fate by such obvious beginnings; who is to the expectant reader in danger of being robbed or half murdered, or frightened by an escaped lunatic, or introduced to his lady-love for the first time, deserves to be detected. I am relieved to say that none of these things occurred to me. The road from Wingdam to Slumgullion knew no other banditti than the regularly licensed hotel-keepers; lunatics had not yet reached such depth of imbecility as to ride of their own free-will in California stages; and my Laura, amiable and long-suffering as she always is, could not, I fear, have borne up against these depressing circumstances long enough to have made the slightest impression on me.

I stood with my shawl and carpet-bag in hand,

gazing doubtingly on the vehicle. Even in the darkness the red dust of Wingdam was visible on its roof and sides, and the red slime of Slumgullion clung tenaciously to its wheels. I opened the door; the stage creaked uneasily, and in the gloomy abyss the swaying straps beckoned me, like ghostly hands, to come in now, and have my sufferings out at once.

I must not omit to mention the occurrence of a circumstance which struck me as appalling and mysterious. A lounger on the steps of the hotel, whom I had reason to suppose was not in any way connected with the stage company, gravely descended, and, walking toward the conveyance, tried the handle of the door, opened it, expectorated in the carriage, and returned to the hotel with a serious demeanor. Hardly had he resumed his position, when another individual, equally disinterested, impassively walked down the steps, proceeded to the back of the stage, lifted it, expectorated carefully on the axle, and returned slowly and pensively to the hotel. A third spectator wearily disengaged himself from one of the Ionic columns of the portico and walked to the box, remained for a moment in serious and expectorative contemplation of the boot, and then returned to his column. There was something so weird in this baptism that I grew quite nervous.

Perhaps I was out of spirits. A number of in-

finitesimal annoyances, winding up with the resolute persistency of the clerk at the stage-office to enter my name misspelt on the way-bill, had not predisposed me to cheerfulness. The inmates of the Eureka House, from a social view-point, were not attractive. There was the prevailing opinion — so common to many honest people — that a serious style of deportment and conduct toward a stranger indicates high gentility and elevated station. Obeying this principle, all hilarity ceased on my entrance to supper, and general remark merged into the safer and uncompromising chronicle of several bad cases of diphtheria, then epidemic at Wingdam. When I left the dining-room, with an odd feeling that I had been supping exclusively on mustard and tea-leaves, I stopped a moment at the parlor door. A piano, harmoniously related to the dinner-bell, tinkled responsive to a diffident and uncertain touch. On the white wall the shadow of an old and sharp profile was bending over several symmetrical and shadowy curls. "I sez to Mariar, Mariar, sez I, 'Praise to the face is open disgrace.'" I heard no more. Dreading some susceptibility to sincere expression on the subject of female loveliness, I walked away, checking the compliment that otherwise might have risen unbidden to my lips, and have brought shame and sorrow to the household.

It was with the memory of these experiences

resting heavily upon me, that I stood hesitatingly before the stage door. The driver, about to mount, was for a moment illuminated by the open door of the hotel. He had the wearied look which was the distinguishing expression of Wingdam. Satisfied that I was properly way-billed and receipted for, he took no further notice of me. I looked longingly at the box-seat, but he did not respond to the appeal. I flung my carpet-bag into the chasm, dived recklessly after it, and — before I was fairly seated — with a great sigh, a creaking of unwilling springs, complaining bolts, and harshly expostulating axle, we moved away. Rather the hotel door slipped behind, the sound of the piano sank to rest, and the night and its shadows moved solemnly upon us.

To say it was dark expressed but faintly the pitchy obscurity that encompassed the vehicle. The roadside trees were scarcely distinguishable as deeper masses of shadow; I knew them only by the peculiar sodden odor that from time to time sluggishly flowed in at the open window as we rolled by. We proceeded slowly; so leisurely that, leaning from the carriage, I more than once detected the fragrant sigh of some astonished cow, whose ruminating repose upon the highway we had ruthlessly disturbed. But in the darkness our progress, more the guidance of some mysterious instinct than any apparent volition of our own, gave an

indefinable charm of security to our journey, that a moment's hesitation or indecision on the part of the driver would have destroyed.

I had indulged a hope that in the empty vehicle I might obtain that rest so often denied me in its crowded condition. It was a weak delusion. When I stretched out my limbs it was only to find that the ordinary conveniences for making several people distinctly uncomfortable were distributed throughout my individual frame. At last, resting my arms on the straps, by dint of much gymnastic effort I became sufficiently composed to be aware of a more refined species of torture. The springs of the stage, rising and falling regularly, produced a rhythmical beat, which began to painfully absorb my attention. Slowly this thumping merged into a senseless echo of the mysterious female of the hotel parlor, and shaped itself into this awful and benumbing axiom,—"Praise-to-the-face-is-open-disgrace. Praise–to–the–face–is–open–disgrace." Inequalities of the road only quickened its utterance or drawled it to an exasperating length.

It was of no use to seriously consider the statement. It was of no use to except to it indignantly. It was of no use to recall the many instances where praise to the face had redounded to the everlasting honor of praiser and bepraised; of no use to dwell sentimentally on modest genius and

courage lifted up and strengthened by open commendation; of no use to except to the mysterious female, — to picture her as rearing a thin-blooded generation on selfish and mechanically repeated axioms, — all this failed to counteract the monotonous repetition of this sentence. There was nothing to do but to give in, — and I was about to accept it weakly, as we too often treat other illusions of darkness and necessity, for the time being, — when I became aware of some other annoyance that had been forcing itself upon me for the last few moments. How quiet the driver was!

Was there any driver? Had I any reason to suppose that he was not lying, gagged and bound on the roadside, and the highwayman, with blackened face who did the thing so quietly, driving me — whither? The thing is perfectly feasible. And what is this fancy now being jolted out of me. A story? It 's of no use to keep it back, — particularly in this abysmal vehicle, and here it comes: I am a Marquis, — a French Marquis; French, because the peerage is not so well known, and the country is better adapted to romantic incident, — a Marquis, because the democratic reader delights in the nobility. My name is something *ligny*. I am coming from Paris to my country-seat at St. Germain. It is a dark night, and I fall asleep and tell my honest coachman, André, not to disturb me, and dream of an angel. The carriage at last stops

at the chateau. It is so dark that when I alight I do not recognize the face of the footman who holds the carriage door. But what of that? — *peste!* I am heavy with sleep. The same obscurity also hides the old familiar indecencies of the statues on the terrace; but there is a door, and it opens and shuts behind me smartly. Then I find myself in a trap, in the presence of the brigand who has quietly gagged poor André and conducted the carriage thither. There is nothing for me to do, as a gallant French Marquis, but to say, "*Parbleu!*" draw my rapier, and die valorously! I am found a week or two after, outside a deserted *cabaret* near the barrier, with a hole through my ruffled linen and my pockets stripped. No; on second thoughts, I am rescued, — rescued by the angel I have been dreaming of, who is the assumed daughter of the brigand, but the real daughter of an intimate friend.

Looking from the window again, in the vain hope of distinguishing the driver, I found my eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness. I could see the distant horizon, defined by India-inky woods, relieving a lighter sky. A few stars widely spaced in this picture glimmered sadly. I noticed again the infinite depth of patient sorrow in their serene faces; and I hope that the Vandal who first applied the flippant "twinkle" to them may not be driven melancholy mad by their reproachful eyes.

I noticed again the mystic charm of space that imparts a sense of individual solitude to each integer of the densest constellation, involving the smallest star with immeasurable loneliness. Something of this calm and solitude crept over me, and I dozed in my gloomy cavern. When I awoke the full moon was rising. Seen from my window, it had an indescribably unreal and theatrical effect. It was the full moon of Norma,—that remarkable celestial phenomenon which rises so palpably to a hushed audience and a sublime *andante* chorus, until the *Casta Diva* is sung,—the "inconstant moon" that then and thereafter remains fixed in the heavens as though it were a part of the solar system inaugurated by Joshua. Again the white-robed Druids filed past me, again I saw that improbable mistletoe cut from that impossible oak, and again cold chills ran down my back with the first strain of the recitative. The thumping springs essayed to beat time, and the private-box-like obscurity of the vehicle lent a cheap enchantment to the view. But it was a vast improvement upon my past experience, and I hugged the fond delusion.

My fears for the driver were dissipated with the rising moon. A familiar sound had assured me of his presence in the full possession of at least one of his most important functions. Frequent and full expectoration convinced me that his lips were as yet not sealed by the gag of highwaymen, and

soothed my anxious ear. With this load lifted from my mind, and assisted by the mild presence of Diana, who left, as when she visited Endymion, much of her splendor outside my cavern, — I looked around the empty vehicle. On the forward seat lay a woman's hair-pin. I picked it up with an interest that, however, soon abated. There was no scent of the roses to cling to it still, not even of hair-oil. No bend or twist in its rigid angles betrayed any trait of its wearer's character. I tried to think that it might have been "Mariar's." I tried to imagine that, confining the symmetrical curls of that girl, it might have heard the soft compliments whispered in her ears, which provoked the wrath of the aged female. But in vain. It was reticent and unswerving in its upright fidelity, and at last slipped listlessly through my fingers.

I had dozed repeatedly, — waked on the threshold of oblivion by contact with some of the angles of the coach, and feeling that I was unconsciously assuming, in imitation of a humble insect of my childish recollection, that spherical shape which could best resist those impressions, when I perceived that the moon, riding high in the heavens, had begun to separate the formless masses of the shadowy landscape. Trees isolated, in clumps and assemblages, changed places before my window. The sharp outlines of the distant

hills came back, as in daylight, but little softened in the dry, cold, dewless air of a California summer night. I was wondering how late it was, and thinking that if the horses of the night travelled as slowly as the team before us, Faustus might have been spared his agonizing prayer, when a sudden spasm of activity attacked my driver. A succession of whip-snappings, like a pack of Chinese crackers, broke from the box before me. The stage leaped forward, and when I could pick myself from under the seat, a long white building had in some mysterious way rolled before my window. It must be Slumgullion! As I descended from the stage I addressed the driver: —

"I thought you changed horses on the road?"

"So we did. Two hours ago."

"That 's odd. I did n't notice it."

"Must have been asleep, sir. Hope you had a pleasant nap. Bully place for a nice quiet snooze, — empty stage, sir!"

THE MAN OF NO ACCOUNT.

HIS name was Fagg,—David Fagg. He came to California in '52 with us, in the "Skyscraper." I don't think he did it in an adventurous way. He probably had no other place to go to. When a knot of us young fellows would recite what splendid opportunities we resigned to go, and how sorry our friends were to have us leave, and show daguerreotypes and locks of hair, and talk of Mary and Susan, the man of no account used to sit by and listen with a pained, mortified expression on his plain face, and say nothing. I think he had nothing to say. He had no associates except when we patronized him; and, in point of fact, he was a good deal of sport to us. He was always sea-sick whenever we had a capful of wind. He never got his sea-legs on either. And I never shall forget how we all laughed when Rattler took him the piece of pork on a string, and — But you know that time-honored joke. And then we had such a splendid lark with him. Miss Fanny Twinkler could n't bear the sight of him, and we used to make Fagg think that she had taken a

fancy to him, and send him little delicacies and books from the cabin. You ought to have witnessed the rich scene that took place when he came up, stammering and very sick, to thank her! Did n't she flash up grandly and beautifully and scornfully? So like "Medora," Rattler said, — Rattler knew Byron by heart, — and was n't old Fagg awfully cut up? But he got over it, and when Rattler fell sick at Valparaiso, old Fagg used to nurse him. You see he was a good sort of fellow, but he lacked manliness and spirit.

He had absolutely no idea of poetry. I 've seen him sit stolidly by, mending his old clothes, when Rattler delivered that stirring apostrophe of Byron's to the ocean. He asked Rattler once, quite seriously, if he thought Byron was ever sea-sick. I don't remember Rattler's reply, but I know we all laughed very much, and I have no doubt it was something good, for Rattler was smart.

When the "Skyscraper" arrived at San Francisco we had a grand "feed." We agreed to meet every year and perpetuate the occasion. Of course we did n't invite Fagg. Fagg was a steerage-passenger, and it was necessary, you see, now we were ashore, to exercise a little discretion. But Old Fagg, as we called him, — he was only about twenty-five years old, by the way, — was the source of immense amusement to us that day. It appeared that he had conceived the idea that he could walk

to Sacramento, and actually started off afoot. We had a good time, and shook hands with one another all around, and so parted. Ah me! only eight years ago, and yet some of those hands then clasped in amity have been clenched at each other, or have dipped furtively in one another's pockets. I know that we did n't dine together the next year, because young Barker swore he would n't put his feet under the same mahogany with such a very contemptible scoundrel as that Mixer; and Nibbles, who borrowed money at Valparaiso of young Stubbs, who was then a waiter in a restaurant, did n't like to meet such people.

When I bought a number of shares in the Coyote Tunnel at Mugginsville, in '54, I thought I 'd take a run up there and see it. I stopped at the Empire Hotel, and after dinner I got a horse and rode round the town and out to the claim. One of those individuals whom newspaper correspondents call "our intelligent informant," and to whom in all small communities the right of answering questions is tacitly yielded, was quietly pointed out to me. Habit had enabled him to work and talk at the same time, and he never pretermitted either. He gave me a history of the claim, and added: "You see, stranger" (he addressed the bank before him), "gold is sure to come out 'er that theer claim (he put in a comma with his pick), but the old pro-pri-e-tor (he wriggled out the word and the

point of his pick) warn't of much account (a long stroke of the pick for a period). He was green, and let the boys about here jump him,"—and the rest of his sentence was confided to his hat, which he had removed to wipe his manly brow with his red bandanna.

I asked him who was the original proprietor.

"His name war Fagg."

I went to see him. He looked a little older and plainer. He had worked hard, he said, and was getting on "so, so." I took quite a liking to him and patronized him to some extent. Whether I did so because I was beginning to have a distrust for such fellows as Rattler and Mixer is not necessary for me to state.

You remember how the Coyote Tunnel went in, and how awfully we shareholders were done! Well, the next thing I heard was that Rattler, who was one of the heaviest shareholders, was up at Mugginsville keeping bar for the proprietor of the Mugginsville Hotel, and that old Fagg had struck it rich, and did n't know what to do with his money. All this was told me by Mixer, who had been there, settling up matters, and likewise that Fagg was sweet upon the daughter of the proprietor of the aforesaid hotel. And so by hearsay and letter I eventually gathered that old Robins, the hotel man, was trying to get up a match between Nellie Robins and Fagg. Nellie was a pretty,

plump, and foolish little thing, and would do just as her father wished. I thought it would be a good thing for Fagg if he should marry and settle down; that as a married man he might be of some account. So I ran up to Mugginsville one day to look after things.

It did me an immense deal of good to make Rattler mix my drinks for me, — Rattler! the gay, brilliant, and unconquerable Rattler, who had tried to snub me two years ago. I talked to him about old Fagg and Nellie, particularly as I thought the subject was distasteful. He never liked Fagg, and he was sure, he said, that Nellie did n't. Did Nellie like anybody else? He turned around to the mirror behind the bar and brushed up his hair! I understood the conceited wretch. I thought I 'd put Fagg on his guard and get him to hurry up matters. I had a long talk with him. You could see by the way the poor fellow acted that he was badly stuck. He sighed, and promised to pluck up courage to hurry matters to a crisis. Nellie was a good girl, and I think had a sort of quiet respect for old Fagg's unobtrusiveness. But her fancy was already taken captive by Rattler's superficial qualities, which were obvious and pleasing. I don't think Nellie was any worse than you or I. We are more apt to take acquaintances at their apparent value than their intrinsic worth. It 's less trouble, and, except when we want to

trust them, quite as convenient. The difficulty with women is that their feelings are apt to get interested sooner than ours, and then, you know, reasoning is out of the question. This is what old Fagg would have known had he been of any account. But he was n't. So much the worse for him.

It was a few months afterward, and I was sitting in my office when in walked old Fagg. I was surprised to see him down, but we talked over the current topics in that mechanical manner of people who know that they have something else to say, but are obliged to get at it in that formal way. After an interval Fagg in his natural manner said, —

"I 'm going home!"

"Going home?"

"Yes, — that is, I think I 'll take a trip to the Atlantic States. I came to see you, as you know I have some little property, and I have executed a power of attorney for you to manage my affairs. I have some papers I 'd like to leave with you. Will you take charge of them?"

"Yes," I said. "But what of Nellie?"

His face fell. He tried to smile, and the combination resulted in one of the most startling and grotesque effects I ever beheld. At length he said, —

"I shall not marry Nellie, — that is," — he

seemed to apologize internally for the positive form of expression, — "I think that I had better not."

"David Fagg," I said with sudden severity, "you 're of no account!"

To my astonishment his face brightened. "Yes," said he, "that 's it! — I 'm of no account! But I always knew it. You see I thought Rattler loved that girl as well as I did, and I knew she liked him better than she did me, and would be happier I dare say with him. But then I knew that old Robins would have preferred me to him, as I was better off, — and the girl would do as he said, — and, you see, I thought I was kinder in the way, — and so I left. But," he continued, as I was about to interrupt him, "for fear the old man might object to Rattler, I 've lent him enough to set him up in business for himself in Dogtown. A pushing, active, brilliant fellow, you know, like Rattler can get along, and will soon be in his old position again, — and you need n't be hard on him, you know, if he does n't. Good by."

I was too much disgusted with his treatment of that Rattler to be at all amiable, but as his business was profitable, I promised to attend to it, and he left. A few weeks passed. The return steamer arrived, and a terrible incident occupied the papers for days afterward. People in all parts of the State conned eagerly the details of an awful shipwreck, and those who had friends aboard went

away by themselves, and read the long list of the lost under their breath. I read of the gifted, the gallant, the noble, and loved ones who had perished, and among them I think I was the first to read the name of David Fagg. For the "man of no account" had "gone home!"

STORIES.

MLISS.

CHAPTER I.

JUST where the Sierra Nevada begins to subside in gentler undulations, and the rivers grow less rapid and yellow, on the side of a great red mountain, stands "Smith's Pocket." Seen from the red road at sunset, in the red light and the red dust, its white houses look like the outcroppings of quartz on the mountain-side. The red stage topped with red-shirted passengers is lost to view half a dozen times in the tortuous descent, turning up unexpectedly in out-of-the-way places, and vanishing altogether within a hundred yards of the town. It is probably owing to this sudden twist in the road that the advent of a stranger at Smith's Pocket is usually attended with a peculiar circumstance. Dismounting from the vehicle at the stage-office, the too confident traveller is apt to walk straight out of town under the impression that it lies in quite another direction. It is related that one of the tunnel-men, two miles from town, met one of these self-

reliant passengers with a carpet-bag, umbrella, Harper's Magazine, and other evidences of "Civilization and Refinement," plodding along over the road he had just ridden, vainly endeavoring to find the settlement of Smith's Pocket.

An observant traveller might have found some compensation for his disappointment in the weird aspect of that vicinity. There were huge fissures on the hillside, and displacements of the red soil, resembling more the chaos of some primary elemental upheaval than the work of man; while, half-way down, a long flume straddled its narrow body and disproportionate legs over the chasm, like an enormous fossil of some forgotten antediluvian. At every step smaller ditches crossed the road, hiding in their sallow depths unlovely streams that crept away to a clandestine union with the great yellow torrent below, and here and there were the ruins of some cabin with the chimney alone left intact and the hearthstone open to the skies.

The settlement of Smith's Pocket owed its origin to the finding of a "pocket" on its site by a veritable Smith. Five thousand dollars were taken out of it in one half-hour by Smith. Three thousand dollars were expended by Smith and others in erecting a flume and in tunnelling. And then Smith's Pocket was found to be only a pocket, and subject like other pockets to deple-

tion. Although Smith pierced the bowels of the great red mountain, that five thousand dollars was the first and last return of his labor. The mountain grew reticent of its golden secrets, and the flume steadily ebbed away the remainder of Smith's fortune. Then Smith went into quartz-mining; then into quartz-milling; then into hydraulics and ditching, and then by easy degrees into saloon-keeping. Presently it was whispered that Smith was drinking a great deal; then it was known that Smith was a habitual drunkard, and then people began to think, as they are apt to, that he had never been anything else. But the settlement of Smith's Pocket, like that of most discoveries, was happily not dependent on the fortune of its pioneer, and other parties projected tunnels and found pockets. So Smith's Pocket became a settlement with its two fancy stores, its two hotels, its one express-office, and its two first families. Occasionally its one long straggling street was overawed by the assumption of the latest San Francisco fashions, imported per express, exclusively to the first families; making outraged Nature, in the ragged outline of her furrowed surface, look still more homely, and putting personal insult on that greater portion of the population to whom the Sabbath, with a change of linen, brought merely the necessity of cleanliness, without the luxury of adornment. Then there

was a Methodist Church, and hard by a Monte Bank, and a little beyond, on the mountain-side, a graveyard; and then a little school-house.

"The Master," as he was known to his little flock, sat alone one night in the school-house, with some open copy-books before him, carefully making those bold and full characters which are supposed to combine the extremes of chirographical and moral excellence, and had got as far as "Riches are deceitful," and was elaborating the noun with an insincerity of flourish that was quite in the spirit of his text, when he heard a gentle tapping. The woodpeckers had been busy about the roof during the day, and the noise did not disturb his work. But the opening of the door, and the tapping continuing from the inside, caused him to look up. He was slightly startled by the figure of a young girl, dirty and shabbily clad. Still, her great black eyes, her coarse, uncombed, lustreless black hair falling over her sun-burned face, her red arms and feet streaked with the red soil, were all familiar to him. It was Melissa Smith, — Smith's motherless child.

"What can she want here?" thought the master. Everybody knew "Mliss," as she was called, throughout the length and height of Red Mountain. Everybody knew her as an incorrigible girl. Her fierce, ungovernable disposition, her mad freaks and lawless character, were in their way as prover-

bial as the story of her father's weaknesses, and as philosophically accepted by the townsfolk. She wrangled with and fought the school-boys with keener invective and quite as powerful arm. She followed the trails with a woodman's craft, and the master had met her before, miles away, shoeless, stockingless, and bareheaded on the mountain road. The miners' camps along the stream supplied her with subsistence during these voluntary pilgrimages, in freely offered alms. Not but that a larger protection had been previously extended to Mliss. The Rev. Joshua McSnagley, "stated" preacher, had placed her in the hotel as servant, by way of preliminary refinement, and had introduced her to his scholars at Sunday school. But she threw plates occasionally at the landlord, and quickly retorted to the cheap witticisms of the guests, and created in the Sabbath school a sensation that was so inimical to the orthodox dulness and placidity of that institution, that, with a decent regard for the starched frocks and unblemished morals of the two pink-and-white-faced children of the first families, the reverend gentleman had her ignominiously expelled. Such were the antecedents, and such the character of Mliss, as she stood before the master. It was shown in the ragged dress, the unkempt hair, and bleeding feet, and asked his pity. It flashed from her black, fearless eyes, and commanded his respect.

"I come here to-night," she said rapidly and boldly, keeping her hard glance on his, "because I knew you was alone. I would n't come here when them gals was here. I hate 'em and they hates me. That 's why. You keep school, don't you? I want to be teached!"

If to the shabbiness of her apparel and uncomeliness of her tangled hair and dirty face she had added the humility of tears, the master would have extended to her the usual moiety of pity, and nothing more. But with the natural, though illogical instincts of his species, her boldness awakened in him something of that respect which all original natures pay unconsciously to one another in any grade. And he gazed at her the more fixedly as she went on still rapidly, her hand on that door-latch and her eyes on his: —

"My name 's Mliss, — Mliss Smith! You can bet your life on that. My father 's Old Smith, — Old Bummer Smith, — that 's what 's the matter with him. Mliss Smith, — and I 'm coming to school!"

"Well?" said the master.

Accustomed to be thwarted and opposed, often wantonly and cruelly, for no other purpose than to excite the violent impulses of her nature, the master's phlegm evidently took her by surprise. She stopped; she began to twist a lock of her hair between her fingers; and the rigid line of upper lip, drawn over the wicked little teeth, relaxed and

quivered slightly. Then her eyes dropped, and something like a blush struggled up to her cheek, and tried to assert itself through the splashes of redder soil, and the sunburn of years. Suddenly she threw herself forward, calling on God to strike her dead, and fell quite weak and helpless, with her face on the master's desk, crying and sobbing as if her heart would break.

The master lifted her gently and waited for the paroxysm to pass. When with face still averted, she was repeating between her sobs the *mea culpa* of childish penitence, — that "she 'd be good, she did n't mean to," etc., it came to him to ask her why she had left Sabbath school.

Why had she left the Sabbath school? — why? O yes. What did he (McSnagley) want to tell her she was wicked for? What did he tell her that God hated her for? If God hated her, what did she want to go to Sabbath school for? *She* did n't want to be "beholden" to anybody who hated her.

Had she told McSnagley this?

Yes, she had.

The master laughed. It was a hearty laugh, and echoed so oddly in the little school-house, and seemed so inconsistent and discordant with the sighing of the pines without, that he shortly corrected himself with a sigh. The sigh was quite as sincere in its way, however, and after a

moment of serious silence he asked about her father.

Her father? What father? Whose father? What had he ever done for her? Why did the girls hate her? Come now! what made the folks say, "Old Bummer Smith's Mliss!" when she passed? Yes; O yes. She wished he was dead, — she was dead, — everybody was dead; and her sobs broke forth anew.

The master then, leaning over her, told her as well as he could what you or I might have said after hearing such unnatural theories from childish lips; only bearing in mind perhaps better than you or I the unnatural facts of her ragged dress, her bleeding feet, and the omnipresent shadow of her drunken father. Then, raising her to her feet, he wrapped his shawl around her, and, bidding her come early in the morning, he walked with her down the road. There he bade her "good night." The moon shone brightly on the narrow path before them. He stood and watched the bent little figure as it staggered down the road, and waited until it had passed the little graveyard and reached the curve of the hill, where it turned and stood for a moment, a mere atom of suffering outlined against the far-off patient stars. Then he went back to his work. But the lines of the copy-book thereafter faded into long parallels of never-ending road, over which childish figures seemed to

pass sobbing and crying into the night. Then, the little school-house seeming lonelier than before, he shut the door and went home.

The next morning Mliss came to school. Her face had been washed, and her coarse black hair bore evidence of recent struggles with the comb, in which both had evidently suffered. The old defiant look shone occasionally in her eyes, but her manner was tamer and more subdued. Then began a series of little trials and self-sacrifices, in which master and pupil bore an equal part, and which increased the confidence and sympathy between them. Although obedient under the master's eye, at times during recess, if thwarted or stung by a fancied slight, Mliss would rage in ungovernable fury, and many a palpitating young savage, finding himself matched with his own weapons of torment, would seek the master with torn jacket and scratched face, and complaints of the dreadful Mliss. There was a serious division among the townspeople on the subject; some threatening to withdraw their children from such evil companionship, and others as warmly upholding the course of the master in his work of reclamation. Meanwhile, with a steady persistence that seemed quite astonishing to him on looking back afterward, the master drew Mliss gradually out of the shadow of her past life, as though it were but her natural progress down the narrow

path on which he had set her feet the moonlit night of their first meeting. Remembering the experience of the evangelical McSnagley, he carefully avoided that Rock of Ages on which that unskilful pilot had shipwrecked her young faith. But if, in the course of her reading, she chanced to stumble upon those few words which have lifted such as she above the level of the older, the wiser, and the more prudent, — if she learned something of a faith that is symbolized by suffering, and the old light softened in her eyes, it did not take the shape of a lesson. A few of the plainer people had made up a little sum by which the ragged Mliss was enabled to assume the garments of respect and civilization; and often a rough shake of the hand, and words of homely commendation from a red-shirted and burly figure, sent a glow to the cheek of the young master, and set him to thinking if it was altogether deserved.

Three months had passed from the time of their first meeting, and the master was sitting late one evening over the moral and sententious copies, when there came a tap at the door, and again Mliss stood before him. She was neatly clad and clean-faced, and there was nothing perhaps but the long black hair and bright black eyes to remind him of his former apparition. "Are you busy?" she asked. "Can you come with me?" — and on his signifying his readiness, in her old wilful way she said, "Come, then, quick!"

They passed out of the door together and into the dark road. As they entered the town the master asked her whither she was going. She replied, "To see my father."

It was the first time he had heard her call him by that filial title, or indeed anything more than "Old Smith" or the "Old Man." It was the first time in three months that she had spoken of him at all, and the master knew she had kept resolutely aloof from him since her great change. Satisfied from her manner that it was fruitless to question her purpose, he passively followed. In out-of-the-way places, low groggeries, restaurants, and saloons; in gambling-hells and dance-houses, the master, preceded by Mliss, came and went. In the reeking smoke and blasphemous outcries of low dens, the child, holding the master's hand, stood and anxiously gazed, seemingly unconscious of all in the one absorbing nature of her pursuit. Some of the revellers, recognizing Mliss, called to the child to sing and dance for them, and would have forced liquor upon her but for the interference of the master. Others, recognizing him mutely, made way for them to pass. So an hour slipped by. Then the child whispered in his ear that there was a cabin on the other side of the creek crossed by the long flume, where she thought he still might be. Thither they crossed, — a toilsome half-hour's walk, — but in vain. They were returning by the

ditch at the abutment of the flume, gazing at the lights of the town on the opposite bank, when, suddenly, sharply, a quick report rang out on the clear night air. The echoes caught it, and carried it round and round Red Mountain, and set the dogs to barking all along the streams. Lights seemed to dance and move quickly on the outskirts of the town for a few moments, the stream rippled quite audibly beside them, a few stones loosened themselves from the hillside and splashed into the stream, a heavy wind seemed to surge the branches of the funereal pines, and then the silence seemed to fall thicker, heavier, and deadlier. The master turned towards Mliss with an unconscious gesture of protection, but the child had gone. Oppressed by a strange fear, he ran quickly down the trail to the river's bed, and, jumping from boulder to boulder, reached the base of Red Mountain and the outskirts of the village. Midway of the crossing he looked up and held his breath in awe. For high above him on the narrow flume he saw the fluttering little figure of his late companion crossing swiftly in the darkness.

He climbed the bank, and, guided by a few lights moving about a central point on the mountain, soon found himself breathless among a crowd of awe-stricken and sorrowful men. Out from among them the child appeared, and, taking the master's hand, led him silently before what seemed a ragged

hole in the mountain. Her face was quite white, but her excited manner gone, and her look that of one to whom some long-expected event had at last happened, — an expression that to the master in his bewilderment seemed almost like relief. The walls of the cavern were partly propped by decaying timbers. The child pointed to what appeared to be some ragged, cast-off clothes left in the hole by the late occupant. The master approached nearer with his flaming dip, and bent over them. It was Smith, already cold, with a pistol in his hand and a bullet in his heart, lying beside his empty pocket.

CHAPTER II.

THE opinion which McSnagley expressed in reference to a "change of heart" supposed to be experienced by Mliss was more forcibly described in the gulches and tunnels. It was thought there that Mliss had "struck a good lead." So when there was a new grave added to the little enclosure, and at the expense of the master a little board and inscription put above it, the Red Mountain Banner came out quite handsomely, and did the fair thing to the memory of one of "our oldest Pioneers," alluding gracefully

to that "bane of noble intellects," and otherwise genteelly shelving our dear brother with the past. "He leaves an only child to mourn his loss," says the Banner, "who is now an exemplary scholar, thanks to the efforts of the Rev. Mr. McSnagley." The Rev. McSnagley, in fact, made a strong point of Mliss's conversion, and, indirectly attributing to the unfortunate child the suicide of her father, made affecting allusions in Sunday school to the beneficial effects of the "silent tomb," and in this cheerful contemplation drove most of the children into speechless horror, and caused the pink-and-white scions of the first families to howl dismally and refuse to be comforted.

The long dry summer came. As each fierce day burned itself out in little whiffs of pearl-gray smoke on the mountain summits, and the up-springing breeze scattered its red embers over the landscape, the green wave which in early spring upheaved above Smith's grave grew sere and dry and hard. In those days the master, strolling in the little churchyard of a Sabbath afternoon, was sometimes surprised to find a few wild-flowers plucked from the damp pine-forests scattered there, and oftener rude wreaths hung upon the little pine cross. Most of these wreaths were formed of a sweet-scented grass, which the children loved to keep in their desks, intertwined with the plumes of the buckeye, the syringa,

and the wood-anemone; and here and there the master noticed the dark blue cowl of the monk's-hood, or deadly aconite. There was something in the odd association of this noxious plant with these memorials which occasioned a painful sensation to the master deeper than his esthetic sense. One day, during a long walk, in crossing a wooded ridge he came upon Mliss in the heart of the forest, perched upon a prostrate pine, on a fantastic throne formed by the hanging plumes of lifeless branches, her lap full of grasses and pine-burrs, and crooning to herself one of the negro melodies of her younger life. Recognizing him at a distance, she made room for him on her elevated throne, and with a grave assumption of hospitality and patronage that would have been ridiculous had it not been so terribly earnest, she fed him with pine-nuts and crab-apples. The master took that opportunity to point out to her the noxious and deadly qualities of the monk's-hood, whose dark blossoms he saw in her lap, and extorted from her a promise not to meddle with it as long as she remained his pupil. This done, — as the master had tested her integrity before, — he rested satisfied, and the strange feeling which had overcome him on seeing them died away.

Of the homes that were offered Mliss when her conversion became known, the master preferred that of Mrs. Morpher, a womanly and kind-hearted

specimen of Southwestern efflorescence, known in her maidenhood as the "Per-rairie Rose." Being one of those who contend resolutely against their own natures, Mrs. Morpher, by a long series of self-sacrifices and struggles, had at last subjugated her naturally careless disposition to principles of "order," which she considered, in common with Mr. Pope, as "Heaven's first law." But she could not entirely govern the orbits of her satellites, however regular her own movements, and even her own "Jeemes" sometimes collided with her. Again her old nature asserted itself in her children. Lycurgus dipped into the cupboard "between meals," and Aristides came home from school without shoes, leaving those important articles on the threshold, for the delight of a barefooted walk down the ditches. Octavia and Cassandra were "keerless" of their clothes. So with but one exception, however much the "Prairie Rose" might have trimmed and pruned and trained her own matured luxuriance, the little shoots came up defiantly wild and straggling. That one exception was Clytemnestra Morpher, aged fifteen. She was the realization of her mother's immaculate conception, — neat, orderly, and dull.

It was an amiable weakness of Mrs. Morpher to imagine that "Clytie" was a consolation and model for Mliss. Following this fallacy, Mrs. Morpher threw Clytie at the head of Mliss when she

was "bad," and set her up before the child for adoration in her penitential moments. It was not, therefore, surprising to the master to hear that Clytie was coming to school, obviously as a favor to the master and as an example for Mliss and others. For "Clytie" was quite a young lady. Inheriting her mother's physical peculiarities, and in obedience to the climatic laws of the Red Mountain region, she was an early bloomer. The youth of Smith's Pocket, to whom this kind of flower was rare, sighed for her in April and languished in May. Enamored swains haunted the school-house at the hour of dismissal. A few were jealous of the master.

Perhaps it was this latter circumstance that opened the master's eyes to another. He could not help noticing that Clytie was romantic; that in school she required a great deal of attention; that her pens were uniformly bad and wanted fixing; that she usually accompanied the request with a certain expectation in her eye that was somewhat disproportionate to the quality of service she verbally required; that she sometimes allowed the curves of a round, plump white arm to rest on his when he was writing her copies; that she always blushed and flung back her blond curls when she did so. I don't remember whether I have stated that the master was a young man,—it 's of little consequence, however; he had been

severely educated in the school in which Clytie was taking her first lesson, and, on the whole, withstood the flexible curves and factitious glance like the fine young Spartan that he was. Perhaps an insufficient quality of food may have tended to this asceticism. He generally avoided Clytie; but one evening, when she returned to the school-house after something she had forgotten, and did not find it until the master walked home with her, I hear that he endeavored to make himself particularly agreeable, — partly from the fact, I imagine, that his conduct was adding gall and bitterness to the already overcharged hearts of Clytemnestra's admirers.

The morning after this affecting episode Mliss did not come to school. Noon came, but not Mliss. Questioning Clytie on the subject, it appeared that they had left the school together, but the wilful Mliss had taken another road. The afternoon brought her not. In the evening he called on Mrs. Morpher, whose motherly heart was really alarmed. Mr. Morpher had spent all day in search of her, without discovering a trace that might lead to her discovery. Aristides was summoned as a probable accomplice, but that equitable infant succeeded in impressing the household with his innocence. Mrs. Morpher entertained a vivid impression that the child would yet be found drowned in a ditch, or, what was almost as terrible, muddied and soiled

beyond the redemption of soap and water. Sick at heart, the master returned to the school-house. As he lit his lamp and seated himself at his desk, he found a note lying before him addressed to himself, in Mliss's handwriting. It seemed to be written on a leaf torn from some old memorandum-book, and, to prevent sacrilegious trifling, had been sealed with six broken wafers. Opening it almost tenderly, the master read as follows:—

RESPECTED SIR, — When you read this, I am run away. Never to come back. *Never*, NEVER, NEVER. You can give my beeds to Mary Jennings, and my Amerika's Pride [a highly colored lithograph from a tobacco-box] to Sally Flanders. But don't you give anything to Clytie Morpher. Don't you dare to. Do you know what my oppinion is of her, it is this, she is perfekly disgustin. That is all and no more at present from

Yours respectfully,

MELISSA SMITH.

The master sat pondering on this strange epistle till the moon lifted its bright face above the distant hills, and illuminated the trail that led to the school-house, beaten quite hard with the coming and going of little feet. Then, more satisfied in mind, he tore the missive into fragments and scattered them along the road.

At sunrise the next morning he was picking his way through the palm-like fern and thick under-

brush of the pine-forest, starting the hare from its form, and awakening a querulous protest from a few dissipated crows, who had evidently been making a night of it, and so came to the wooded ridge where he had once found Mliss. There he found the prostrate pine and tasselled branches, but the throne was vacant. As he drew nearer, what might have been some frightened animal started through the crackling limbs. It ran up the tossed arms of the fallen monarch, and sheltered itself in some friendly foliage. The master, reaching the old seat, found the nest still warm; looking up in the intertwining branches, he met the black eyes of the errant Mliss. They gazed at each other without speaking. She was first to break the silence.

"What do you want?" she asked curtly.

The master had decided on a course of action. "I want some crab-apples," he said humbly.

"Sha' n't have 'em! go away. Why don't you get 'em of Clytemnerestera?" (It seemed to be a relief to Mliss to express her contempt in additional syllables to that classical young woman's already long-drawn title.) "O you wicked thing!"

"I am hungry, Lissy. I have eaten nothing since dinner yesterday. I am famished!" and the young man in a state of remarkable exhaustion leaned against the tree.

Melissa's heart was touched. In the bitter days of her gypsy life she had known the sensation he

so artfully simulated. Overcome by his heart-broken tone, but not entirely divested of suspicion, she said, —

"Dig under the tree near the roots, and you 'll find lots; but mind you don't tell," for Mliss had *her* hoards as well as the rats and squirrels.

But the master, of course, was unable to find them; the effects of hunger probably blinding his senses. Mliss grew uneasy. At length she peered at him through the leaves in an elfish way, and questioned, —

"If I come down and give you some, you 'll promise you won't touch me?"

The master promised.

"Hope you 'll die if you do!"

The master accepted instant dissolution as a forfeit. Mliss slid down the tree. For a few moments nothing transpired but the munching of the pine-nuts. "Do you feel better?" she asked, with some solicitude. The master confessed to a recuperated feeling, and then, gravely thanking her, proceeded to retrace his steps. As he expected, he had not gone far before she called him. He turned. She was standing there quite white, with tears in her widely opened orbs. The master felt that the right moment had come. Going up to her, he took both her hands, and, looking in her tearful eyes, said, gravely, "Lissy, do you remember the first evening you came to see me?"

Lissy remembered.

"You asked me if you might come to school, for you wanted to learn something and be better, and I said —"

"Come," responded the child, promptly.

"What would *you* say if the master now came to you and said that he was lonely without his little scholar, and that he wanted her to come and teach him to be better?"

The child hung her head for a few moments in silence. The master waited patiently. Tempted by the quiet, a hare ran close to the couple, and raising her bright eyes and velvet forepaws, sat and gazed at them. A squirrel ran half-way down the furrowed bark of the fallen tree, and there stopped.

"We are waiting, Lissy," said the master, in a whisper, and the child smiled. Stirred by a passing breeze, the tree-tops rocked, and a long pencil of light stole through their interlaced boughs full on the doubting face and irresolute little figure. Suddenly she took the master's hand in her quick way. What she said was scarcely audible, but the master, putting the black hair back from her forehead, kissed her; and so, hand in hand, they passed out of the damp aisles and forest odors into the open sunlit road.

CHAPTER III.

SOMEWHAT less spiteful in her intercourse with other scholars, Mliss still retained an offensive attitude in regard to Clytemnestra. Perhaps the jealous element was not entirely lulled in her passionate little breast. Perhaps it was only that the round curves and plump outline offered more extended pinching surface. But while such ebullitions were under the master's control, her enmity occasionally took a new and irrepressible form.

The master in his first estimate of the child's character could not conceive that she had ever possessed a doll. But the master, like many other professed readers of character, was safer in *a posteriori* than *a priori* reasoning. Mliss had a doll, but then it was emphatically Mliss's doll,—a smaller copy of herself. Its unhappy existence had been a secret discovered accidentally by Mrs. Morpher. It had been the old-time companion of Mliss's wanderings, and bore evident marks of suffering. Its original complexion was long since washed away by the weather and anointed by the slime of ditches. It looked very much as Mliss had in days past. Its one gown of faded stuff was dirty and ragged as hers had been. Mliss had

never been known to apply to it any childish term of endearment. She never exhibited it in the presence of other children. It was put severely to bed in a hollow tree near the school-house, and only allowed exercise during Mliss's rambles. Fulfilling a stern duty to her doll, as she would to herself, it knew no luxuries.

Now Mrs. Morpher, obeying a commendable impulse, bought another doll and gave it to Mliss. The child received it gravely and curiously. The master on looking at it one day fancied he saw a slight resemblance in its round red cheeks and mild blue eyes to Clytemnestra. It became evident before long that Mliss had also noticed the same resemblance. Accordingly she hammered its waxen head on the rocks when she was alone, and sometimes dragged it with a string round its neck to and from school. At other times, setting it up on her desk, she made a pin-cushion of its patient and inoffensive body. Whether this was done in revenge of what she considered a second figurative obtrusion of Clytie's excellences upon her, or whether she had an intuitive appreciation of the rites of certain other heathens, and, indulging in that "Fetish" ceremony, imagined that the original of her wax model would pine away and finally die, is a metaphysical question I shall not now consider.

In spite of these moral vagaries, the master could not help noticing in her different tasks the

working of a quick, restless, and vigorous perception. She knew neither the hesitancy nor the doubts of childhood. Her answers in class were always slightly dashed with audacity. Of course she was not infallible. But her courage and daring in passing beyond her own depth and that of the floundering little swimmers around her, in their minds outweighed all errors of judgment. Children are not better than grown people in this respect, I fancy; and whenever the little red hand flashed above her desk, there was a wondering silence, and even the master was sometimes oppressed with a doubt of his own experience and judgment.

Nevertheless, certain attributes which at first amused and entertained his fancy began to afflict him with grave doubts. He could not but see that Mliss was revengeful, irreverent, and wilful. That there was but one better quality which pertained to her semi-savage disposition, — the faculty of physical fortitude and self-sacrifice, and another, though not always an attribute of the noble savage, — Truth. Mliss was both fearless and sincere; perhaps in such a character the adjectives were synonymous.

The master had been doing some hard thinking on this subject, and had arrived at that conclusion quite common to all who think sincerely, that he was generally the slave of his own prejudices,

when he determined to call on the Rev. McSnagley for advice. This decision was somewhat humiliating to his pride, as he and McSnagley were not friends. But he thought of Mliss, and the evening of their first meeting; and perhaps with a pardonable superstition that it was not chance alone that had guided her wilful feet to the schoolhouse, and perhaps with a complacent consciousness of the rare magnanimity of the act, he choked back his dislike and went to McSnagley.

The reverend gentleman was glad to see him. Moreover, he observed that the master was looking "peartish," and hoped he had got over the "neuralgy" and "rheumatiz." He himself had been troubled with a dumb "ager" since last conference. But he had learned to "rastle and pray."

Pausing a moment to enable the master to write his certain method of curing the dumb "ager" upon the book and volume of his brain, Mr. McSnagley proceeded to inquire after Sister Morpher. "She is an adornment to Chris*tew*anity, and has a likely growin' young family," added Mr. McSnagley; "and there 's that mannerly young gal, — so well behaved, — Miss Clytie." In fact, Clytie's perfections seemed to affect him to such an extent that he dwelt for several minutes upon them. The master was doubly embarrassed. In the first place, there was an enforced contrast with poor Mliss in all this praise of Clytie. Secondly, there was

something unpleasantly confidential in his tone of speaking of Mrs. Morpher's earliest born. So that the master, after a few futile efforts to say something natural, found it convenient to recall another engagement, and left without asking the information required, but in his after reflections somewhat unjustly giving the Rev. Mr. McSnagley the full benefit of having refused it.

Perhaps this rebuff placed the master and pupil once more in the close communion of old. The child seemed to notice the change in the master's manner, which had of late been constrained, and in one of their long post-prandial walks she stopped suddenly, and, mounting a stump, looked full in his face with big, searching eyes. "You ain't mad?" said she, with an interrogative shake of the black braids. "No." "Nor bothered?" "No." "Nor hungry?" (Hunger was to Mliss a sickness that might attack a person at any moment.) "No." "Nor thinking of her?" "Of whom, Lissy?" "That white girl." (This was the latest epithet invented by Mliss, who was a very dark brunette, to express Clytemnestra.) "No." "Upon your word?" (A substitute for "Hope you'll die!" proposed by the master.) "Yes." "And sacred honor?" "Yes." Then Mliss gave him a fierce little kiss, and, hopping down, fluttered off. For two or three days after that she condescended to appear more like other children, and be, as she expressed it, "good."

Two years had passed since the master's advent at Smith's Pocket, and as his salary was not large, and the prospects of Smith's Pocket eventually becoming the capital of the State not entirely definite, he contemplated a change. He had informed the school trustees privately of his intentions, but, educated young men of unblemished moral character being scarce at that time, he consented to continue his school term through the winter to early spring. None else knew of his intention except his one friend, a Dr. Duchesne, a young Creole physician known to the people of Wingdam as "Duchesny." He never mentioned it to Mrs. Morpher, Clytie, or any of his scholars. His reticence was partly the result of a constitutional indisposition to fuss, partly a desire to be spared the questions and surmises of vulgar curiosity, and partly that he never really believed he was going to do anything before it was done.

He did not like to think of Mliss. It was a selfish instinct, perhaps, which made him try to fancy his feeling for the child was foolish, romantic, and unpractical. He even tried to imagine that she would do better under the control of an older and sterner teacher. Then she was nearly eleven, and in a few years, by the rules of Red Mountain, would be a woman. He had done his duty. After Smith's death he addressed letters to Smith's relatives, and received one answer from a

sister of Melissa's mother. Thanking the master, she stated her intention of leaving the Atlantic States for California with her husband in a few months. This was a slight superstructure for the airy castle which the master pictured for Mliss's home, but it was easy to fancy that some loving, sympathetic woman, with the claims of kindred, might better guide her wayward nature. Yet, when the master had read the letter, Mliss listened to it carelessly, received it submissively, and afterwards cut figures out of it with her scissors, supposed to represent Clytemnestra, labelled "the white girl," to prevent mistakes, and impaled them upon the outer walls of the school-house.

When the summer was about spent, and the last harvest had been gathered in the valleys, the master bethought him of gathering in a few ripened shoots of the young idea, and of having his Harvest-Home, or Examination. So the savans and professionals of Smith's Pocket were gathered to witness that time-honored custom of placing timid children in a constrained position, and bullying them as in a witness-box. As usual in such cases, the most audacious and self-possessed were the lucky recipients of the honors. The reader will imagine that in the present instance Mliss and Clytie were pre-eminent, and divided public attention; Mliss with her clearness of material perception and self-reliance, Clytie with her placid

self-esteem and saint-like correctness of deportment. The other little ones were timid and blundering. Mliss's readiness and brilliancy, of course, captivated the greatest number and provoked the greatest applause. Mliss's antecedents had unconsciously awakened the strongest sympathies of a class whose athletic forms were ranged against the walls, or whose handsome bearded faces looked in at the windows. But Mliss's popularity was overthrown by an unexpected circumstance.

McSnagley had invited himself, and had been going through the pleasing entertainment of frightening the more timid pupils by the vaguest and most ambiguous questions delivered in an impressive funereal tone; and Mliss had soared into Astronomy, and was tracking the course of our spotted ball through space, and keeping time with the music of the spheres, and defining the tethered orbits of the planets, when McSnagley impressively arose. "Meelissy! ye were speaking of the revolutions of this yere yearth and the move-*ments* of the sun, and I think ye said it had been a doing of it since the creashun, eh?" Mliss nodded a scornful affirmative. "Well, war that the truth?" said McSnagley, folding his arms. "Yes," said Mliss, shutting up her little red lips tightly. The handsome outlines at the windows peered further in the schoolroom, and a saintly Raphael-face, with blond beard and soft blue eyes, belonging to the biggest scamp

in the diggings, turned toward the child and whispered, "Stick to it, Mliss!" The reverend gentleman heaved a deep sigh, and cast a compassionate glance at the master, then at the children, and then rested his look on Clytie. That young woman softly elevated her round, white arm. Its seductive curves were enhanced by a gorgeous and massive specimen bracelet, the gift of one of her humblest worshippers, worn in honor of the occasion. There was a momentary silence. Clytie's round cheeks were very pink and soft. Clytie's big eyes were very bright and blue. Clytie's low-necked white book-muslin rested softly on Clytie's white, plump shoulders. Clytie looked at the master, and the master nodded. Then Clytie spoke softly: —

"Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and it obeyed him!" There was a low hum of applause in the school-room, a triumphant expression on McSnagley's face, a grave shadow on the master's, and a comical look of disappointment reflected from the windows. Mliss skimmed rapidly over her Astronomy, and then shut the book with a loud snap. A groan burst from McSnagley, an expression of astonishment from the school-room, a yell from the windows, as Mliss brought her red fist down on the desk, with the emphatic declaration, —

"It 's a d—n lie. I don't believe it!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE long wet season had drawn near its close. Signs of spring were visible in the swelling buds and rushing torrents. The pine-forests exhaled the fresher spicery. The azaleas were already budding, the Ceanothus getting ready its lilac livery for spring. On the green upland which climbed Red Mountain at its southern aspect the long spike of the monk's-hood shot up from its broad-leaved stool, and once more shook its dark-blue bells. Again the billow above Smith's grave was soft and green, its crest just tossed with the foam of daisies and buttercups. The little graveyard had gathered a few new dwellers in the past year, and the mounds were placed two by two by the little paling until they reached Smith's grave, and there there was but one. General superstition had shunned it, and the plot beside Smith was vacant.

There had been several placards posted about the town, intimating that, at a certain period, a celebrated dramatic company would perform, for a few days, a series of "side-splitting" and "screaming farces"; that, alternating pleasantly with this, there would be some melodrama and a grand divertisement, which would include singing,

dancing, etc. These announcements occasioned a great fluttering among the little folk, and were the theme of much excitement and great speculation among the master's scholars. The master had promised Mliss, to whom this sort of thing was sacred and rare, that she should go, and on that momentous evening the master and Mliss "assisted."

The performance was the prevalent style of heavy mediocrity; the melodrama was not bad enough to laugh at nor good enough to excite. But the master, turning wearily to the child, was astonished, and felt something like self-accusation in noticing the peculiar effect upon her excitable nature. The red blood flushed in her cheeks at each stroke of her panting little heart. Her small passionate lips were slightly parted to give vent to her hurried breath. Her widely opened lids threw up and arched her black eyebrows. She did not laugh at the dismal comicalities of the funny man, for Mliss seldom laughed. Nor was she discreetly affected to the delicate extremes of the corner of a white handkerchief, as was the tender-hearted "Clytie," who was talking with her "feller" and ogling the master at the same moment. But when the performance was over, and the green curtain fell on the little stage, Mliss drew a long deep breath, and turned to the master's grave face with a half-apologetic smile and wearied gesture.

Then she said, "Now take me home!" and dropped the lids of her black eyes, as if to dwell once more in fancy on the mimic stage.

On their way to Mrs. Morpher's the master thought proper to ridicule the whole performance. Now he should n't wonder if Mliss thought that the young lady who acted so beautifully was really in earnest, and in love with the gentleman who wore such fine clothes. Well, if she were in love with him it was a very unfortunate thing! "Why?" said Mliss, with an upward sweep of the drooping lid. "Oh! well, he could n't support his wife at his present salary, and pay so much a week for his fine clothes, and then they would n't receive as much wages if they were married as if they were merely lovers, — that is," added the master, "if they are not already married to somebody else; but I think the husband of the pretty young countess takes the tickets at the door, or pulls up the curtain, or snuffs the candles, or does something equally refined and elegant. As to the young man with nice clothes, which are really nice now, and must cost at least two and a half or three dollars, not to speak of that mantle of red drugget which I happen to know the price of, for I bought some of it for my room once, — as to this young man, Lissy, he is a pretty good fellow, and if he does drink occasionally, I don't think people ought to take advantage of it and give him

black eyes and throw him in the mud. Do you? I am sure he might owe me two dollars and a half a long time, before I would throw it up in his face, as the fellow did the other night at Wingdam."

Mliss had taken his hand in both of hers and was trying to look in his eyes, which the young man kept as resolutely averted. Mliss had a faint idea of irony, indulging herself sometimes in a species of sardonic humor, which was equally visible in her actions and her speech. But the young man continued in this strain until they had reached Mrs. Morpher's, and he had deposited Mliss in her maternal charge. Waiving the invitation of Mrs. Morpher to refreshment and rest, and shading his eyes with his hand to keep out the blue-eyed Clytemnestra's siren glances, he excused himself, and went home.

For two or three days after the advent of the dramatic company, Mliss was late at school, and the master's usual Friday afternoon ramble was for once omitted, owing to the absence of his trustworthy guide. As he was putting away his books and preparing to leave the school-house, a small voice piped at his side, "Please, sir?" The master turned and there stood Aristides Morpher.

"Well, my little man," said the master, impatiently, "what is it? quick!"

"Please, sir, me and 'Kerg' thinks that Mliss is going to run away agin."

"What 's that, sir?" said the master, with that unjust testiness with which we always receive disagreeable news.

"Why, sir, she don't stay home any more, and 'Kerg' and me see her talking with one of those actor fellers, and she 's with him now; and please, sir, yesterday she told 'Kerg' and me she could make a speech as well as Miss Cellerstina Montmoressy, and she spouted right off by heart," and the little fellow paused in a collapsed condition.

"What actor?" asked the master.

"Him as wears the shiny hat. And hair. And gold pin. And gold chain," said the just Aristides, putting periods for commas to eke out his breath.

The master put on his gloves and hat, feeling an unpleasant tightness in his chest and thorax, and walked out in the road. Aristides trotted along by his side, endeavoring to keep pace with his short legs to the master's strides, when the master stopped suddenly, and Aristides bumped up against him. "Where were they talking?" asked the master, as if continuing the conversation.

"At the Arcade," said Aristides.

When they reached the main street the master paused. "Run down home," said he to the boy. "If Mliss is there, come to the Arcade and tell me. If she is n't there, stay home; run!" And off trotted the short-legged Aristides.

The Arcade was just across the way, — a long

rambling building containing a bar-room, billiard-room, and restaurant. As the young man crossed the plaza he noticed that two or three of the passers-by turned and looked after him. He looked at his clothes, took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, before he entered the bar-room. It contained the usual number of loungers, who stared at him as he entered. One of them looked at him so fixedly and with such a strange expression that the master stopped and looked again, and then saw it was only his own reflection in a large mirror. This made the master think that perhaps he was a little excited, and so he took up a copy of the Red Mountain Banner from one of the tables, and tried to recover his composure by reading the column of advertisements.

He then walked through the bar-room, through the restaurant, and into the billiard-room. The child was not there. In the latter apartment a person was standing by one of the tables with a broad-brimmed glazed hat on his head. The master recognized him as the agent of the dramatic company; he had taken a dislike to him at their first meeting, from the peculiar fashion of wearing his beard and hair. Satisfied that the object of his search was not there, he turned to the man with a glazed hat. He had noticed the master, but tried that common trick of unconsciousness, in which vulgar natures always fail. Balancing a billiard-

cue in his hand, he pretended to play with a ball in the centre of the table. The master stood opposite to him until he raised his eyes; when their glances met, the master walked up to him.

He had intended to avoid a scene or quarrel, but when he began to speak, something kept rising in his throat and retarded his utterance, and his own voice frightened him, it sounded so distant, low, and resonant. "I understand," he began, "that Melissa Smith, an orphan, and one of my scholars, has talked with you about adopting your profession. Is that so?"

The man with the glazed hat leaned over the table, and made an imaginary shot, that sent the ball spinning round the cushions. Then walking round the table he recovered the ball and placed it upon the spot. This duty discharged, getting ready for another shot, he said, —

"S'pose she has?"

The master choked up again, but, squeezing the cushion of the table in his gloved hand, he went on: —

"If you are a gentleman, I have only to tell you that I am her guardian, and responsible for her career. You know as well as I do the kind of life you offer her. As you may learn of any one here, I have already brought her out of an existence worse than death, — out of the streets and the contamination of vice. I am trying to do so again.

Let us talk like men. She has neither father, mother, sister, or brother. Are you seeking to give her an equivalent for these?"

The man with the glazed hat examined the point of his cue, and then looked around for somebody to enjoy the joke with him.

"I know that she is a strange, wilful girl," continued the master, "but she is better than she was. I believe that I have some influence over her still. I beg and hope, therefore, that you will take no further steps in this matter, but as a man, as a gentleman, leave her to me. I am willing—" But here something rose again in the master's throat, and the sentence remained unfinished.

The man with the glazed hat, mistaking the master's silence, raised his head with a coarse, brutal laugh, and said in a loud voice,—

"Want her yourself, do you? That cock won't fight here, young man!"

The insult was more in the tone than the words, more in the glance than tone, and more in the man's instinctive nature than all these. The best appreciable rhetoric to this kind of animal is a blow. The master felt this, and, with his pent-up, nervous energy finding expression in the one act, he struck the brute full in his grinning face. The blow sent the glazed hat one way and the cue another, and tore the glove and skin from the master's hand from knuckle to joint. It opened

up the corners of the fellow's mouth, and spoilt the peculiar shape of his beard for some time to come.

There was a shout, an imprecation, a scuffle, and the trampling of many feet. Then the crowd parted right and left, and two sharp quick reports followed each other in rapid succession. Then they closed again about his opponent, and the master was standing alone. He remembered picking bits of burning wadding from his coat-sleeve with his left hand. Some one was holding his other hand. Looking at it, he saw it was still bleeding from the blow, but his fingers were clenched around the handle of a glittering knife. He could not remember when or how he got it.

The man who was holding his hand was Mr. Morpher. He hurried the master to the door, but the master held back, and tried to tell him as well as he could with his parched throat about "Mliss." "It 's all right, my boy," said Mr. Morpher. "She 's home!" And they passed out into the street together. As they walked along Mr. Morpher said that Mliss had come running into the house a few moments before, and had dragged him out, saying that somebody was trying to kill the master at the Arcade. Wishing to be alone, the master promised Mr. Morpher that he would not seek the Agent again that night, and parted from him, taking the road toward the school-house. He was surprised

in nearing it to find the door open, — still more surprised to find Mliss sitting there.

The master's nature, as I have hinted before, had, like most sensitive organizations, a selfish basis. The brutal taunt thrown out by his late adversary still rankled in his heart. It was possible, he thought, that such a construction might be put upon his affection for the child, which at best was foolish and Quixotic. Besides, had she not voluntarily abnegated his authority and affection? And what had everybody else said about her? Why should he alone combat the opinion of all, and be at last obliged tacitly to confess the truth of all they had predicted? And he had been a participant in a low bar-room fight with a common boor, and risked his life, to prove what? What had he proved? Nothing? What would the people say? What would his friends say? What would McSnagley say?

In his self-accusation the last person he should have wished to meet was Mliss. He entered the door, and, going up to his desk, told the child, in a few cold words, that he was busy, and wished to be alone. As she rose he took her vacant seat, and, sitting down, buried his head in his hands. When he looked up again she was still standing there. She was looking at his face with an anxious expression.

"Did you kill him?" she asked.

"No!" said the master.

"That's what I gave you the knife for!" said the child, quickly.

"Gave me the knife?" repeated the master, in bewilderment.

"Yes, gave you the knife. I was there under the bar. Saw you hit him. Saw you both fall. He dropped his old knife. I gave it to you. Why did n't you stick him?" said Mliss rapidly, with an expressive twinkle of the black eyes and a gesture of the little red hand.

The master could only look his astonishment.

"Yes," said Mliss. "If you'd asked me, I'd told you I was off with the play-actors. Why was I off with the play-actors? Because you would n't tell me you was going away. I knew it. I heard you tell the Doctor so. I was n't a goin' to stay here alone with those Morphers. I'd rather die first."

With a dramatic gesture which was perfectly consistent with her character, she drew from her bosom a few limp green leaves, and, holding them out at arm's-length, said in her quick vivid way, and in the queer pronunciation of her old life, which she fell into when unduly excited, —

"That's the poison plant you said would kill me. I'll go with the play-actors, or I'll eat this and die here. I don't care which. I won't stay here, where they hate and despise me! Neither

would you let me, if you did n't hate and despise me too!"

The passionate little breast heaved, and two big tears peeped over the edge of Mliss's eyelids, but she whisked them away with the corner of her apron as if they had been wasps.

"If you lock me up in jail," said Mliss, fiercely, "to keep me from the play-actors, I'll poison myself. Father killed himself, — why should n't I? You said a mouthful of that root would kill me, and I always carry it here," and she struck her breast with her clenched fist.

The master thought of the vacant plot beside Smith's grave, and of the passionate little figure before him. Seizing her hands in his and looking full into her truthful eyes, he said, —

"Lissy, will you go with *me?*"

The child put her arms around his neck, and said joyfully, "Yes."

"But now — to-night?"

"To-night."

And, hand in hand, they passed into the road, — the narrow road that had once brought her weary feet to the master's door, and which it seemed she should not tread again alone. The stars glittered brightly above them. For good or ill the lesson had been learned, and behind them the school of Red Mountain closed upon them forever.

THE RIGHT EYE OF THE COMMANDER

THE year of grace 1797 passed away on the coast of California in a southwesterly gale. The little bay of San Carlos, albeit sheltered by the headlands of the blessed Trinity, was rough and turbulent; its foam clung quivering to the seaward wall of the Mission garden; the air was filled with flying sand and spume, and as the Señor Comandante, Hermenegildo Salvatierra, looked from the deep embrasured window of the Presidio guard-room, he felt the salt breath of the distant sea buffet a color into his smoke-dried cheeks.

The Commander, I have said, was gazing thoughtfully from the window of the guard-room. He may have been reviewing the events of the year now about to pass away. But, like the garrison at the Presidio, there was little to review; the year, like its predecessors, had been uneventful, — the days had slipped by in a delicious monotony of simple duties, unbroken by incident or interruption. The regularly recurring feasts and saints' days, the half-yearly courier from San Diego, the rare transport-ship and rarer foreign

vessel, were the mere details of his patriarchal life. If there was no achievement, there was certainly no failure. Abundant harvests and patient industry amply supplied the wants of Presidio and Mission. Isolated from the family of nations, the wars which shook the world concerned them not so much as the last earthquake; the struggle that emancipated their sister colonies on the other side of the continent to them had no suggestiveness. In short, it was that glorious Indian summer of California history, around which so much poetical haze still lingers, — that bland, indolent autumn of Spanish rule, so soon to be followed by the wintry storms of Mexican independence and the reviving spring of American conquest.

The Commander turned from the window and walked toward the fire that burned brightly on the deep oven-like hearth. A pile of copy-books, the work of the Presidio school, lay on the table. As he turned over the leaves with a paternal interest, and surveyed the fair round Scripture text, — the first pious pot-hooks of the pupils of San Carlos, — an audible commentary fell from his lips: "'Abimelech took her from Abraham'— ah, little one, excellent! — 'Jacob sent to see his brother' — body of Christ! that up-stroke of thine, Paquita, is marvellous; the Governor shall see it!" A film of honest pride dimmed the Commander's left eye, — the right, alas! twenty years

before had been sealed by an Indian arrow. He rubbed it softly with the sleeve of his leather jacket, and continued: "'The Ishmaelites having arrived —'"

He stopped, for there was a step in the court-yard, a foot upon the threshold, and a stranger entered. With the instinct of an old soldier, the Commander, after one glance at the intruder, turned quickly toward the wall, where his trusty Toledo hung, or should have been hanging. But it was not there, and as he recalled that the last time he had seen that weapon it was being ridden up and down the gallery by Pepito, the infant son of Bautista, the tortilio-maker, he blushed and then contented himself with frowning upon the intruder.

But the stranger's air, though irreverent, was decidedly peaceful. He was unarmed, and wore the ordinary cape of tarpauling and sea-boots of a mariner. Except a villanous smell of codfish, there was little about him that was peculiar.

His name, as he informed the Commander, in Spanish that was more fluent than elegant or precise, — his name was Peleg Scudder. He was master of the schooner "General Court," of the port of Salem, in Massachusetts, on a trading-voyage to the South Seas, but now driven by stress of weather into the bay of San Carlos. He begged permission to ride out the gale under the head-

lands of the blessed Trinity, and no more. Water he did not need, having taken in a supply at Bodega. He knew the strict surveillance of the Spanish port regulations in regard to foreign vessels, and would do nothing against the severe discipline and good order of the settlement. There was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his tone as he glanced toward the desolate parade-ground of the Presidio and the open unguarded gate. The fact was that the sentry, Felipe Gomez, had discreetly retired to shelter at the beginning of the storm, and was then sound asleep in the corridor.

The Commander hesitated. The port regulations were severe, but he was accustomed to exercise individual authority, and beyond an old order issued ten years before, regarding the American ship "Columbia," there was no precedent to guide him. The storm was severe, and a sentiment of humanity urged him to grant the stranger's request. It is but just to the Commander to say, that his inability to enforce a refusal did not weigh with his decision. He would have denied with equal disregard of consequences that right to a seventy-four gun ship which he now yielded so gracefully to this Yankee trading-schooner. He stipulated only, that there should be no communication between the ship and shore. "For yourself, Señor Captain," he continued, "accept my hospitality. The fort is yours as long as you shall

grace it with your distinguished presence"; and with old-fashioned courtesy, he made the semblance of withdrawing from the guard-room.

Master Peleg Scudder smiled as he thought of the half-dismantled fort, the two mouldy brass cannon, cast in Manila a century previous, and the shiftless garrison. A wild thought of accepting the Commander's offer literally, conceived in the reckless spirit of a man who never let slip an offer for trade, for a moment filled his brain, but a timely reflection of the commercial unimportance of the transaction checked him. He only took a capacious quid of tobacco, as the Commander gravely drew a settle before the fire, and in honor of his guest untied the black silk handkerchief that bound his grizzled brows.

What passed between Salvatierra and his guest that night it becomes me not, as a grave chronicler of the salient points of history, to relate. I have said that Master Peleg Scudder was a fluent talker, and under the influence of divers strong waters, furnished by his host, he became still more loquacious. And think of a man with a twenty years' budget of gossip! The Commander learned, for the first time, how Great Britain lost her colonies; of the French Revolution; of the great Napoleon, whose achievements, perhaps, Peleg colored more highly than the Commander's superiors would have liked. And when Peleg turned questioner, the

Commander was at his mercy. He gradually made himself master of the gossip of the Mission and Presidio, the "small-beer" chronicles of that pastoral age, the conversion of the heathen, the Presidio schools, and even asked the Commander how he had lost his eye! It is said that at this point of the conversation Master Peleg produced from about his person divers small trinkets, kick-shaws and new-fangled trifles, and even forced some of them upon his host. It is further alleged that under the malign influence of Peleg and several glasses of *aguardiente*, the Commander lost somewhat of his decorum, and behaved in a manner unseemly for one in his position, reciting high-flown Spanish poetry, and even piping in a thin, high voice, divers madrigals and heathen canzonets of an amorous complexion; chiefly in regard to a "little one" who was his, the Commander's, "soul"! These allegations, perhaps unworthy the notice of a serious chronicler, should be received with great caution, and are introduced here as simple hearsay. That the Commander, however, took a handkerchief and attempted to show his guest the mysteries of the *sembi cuacua*, capering in an agile but indecorous manner about the apartment, has been denied. Enough for the purposes of this narrative, that at midnight Peleg assisted his host to bed with many protestations of undying friendship, and then, as the gale had abated, took his

leave of the Presidio and hurried aboard the "General Court." When the day broke the ship was gone.

I know not if Peleg kept his word with his host. It is said that the holy fathers at the Mission that night heard a loud chanting in the plaza, as of the heathens singing psalms through their noses; that for many days after an odor of salt codfish prevailed in the settlement; that a dozen hard nutmegs, which were unfit for spice or seed, were found in the possession of the wife of the baker, and that several bushels of shoe-pegs, which bore a pleasing resemblance to oats, but were quite inadequate to the purposes of provender, were discovered in the stable of the blacksmith. But when the reader reflects upon the sacredness of a Yankee trader's word, the stringent discipline of the Spanish port regulations, and the proverbial indisposition of my countrymen to impose upon the confidence of a simple people, he will at once reject this part of the story.

A roll of drums, ushering in the year 1798, awoke the Commander. The sun was shining brightly, and the storm had ceased. He sat up in bed, and through the force of habit rubbed his left eye. As the remembrance of the previous night came back to him, he jumped from his couch and ran to the window. There was no ship in the

bay. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he rubbed both of his eyes. Not content with this, he consulted the metallic mirror which hung beside his crucifix. There was no mistake; the Commander had a visible second eye, — a right one, — as good, save for the purposes of vision, as the left.

Whatever might have been the true secret of this transformation, but one opinion prevailed at San Carlos. It was one of those rare miracles vouchsafed a pious Catholic community as an evidence to the heathen, through the intercession of the blessed San Carlos himself. That their beloved Commander, the temporal defender of the Faith, should be the recipient of this miraculous manifestation was most fit and seemly. The Commander himself was reticent; he could not tell a falsehood, — he dared not tell the truth. After all, if the good folk of San Carlos believed that the powers of his right eye were actually restored, was it wise and discreet for him to undeceive them? For the first time in his life the Commander thought of policy, — for the first time he quoted that text which has been the lure of so many well-meaning but easy Christians, of being "all things to all men." Infeliz Hermenegildo Salvatierra!

For by degrees an ominous whisper crept through the little settlement. The Right Eye of the Com-

mander, although miraculous, seemed to exercise a baleful effect upon the beholder. No one could look at it without winking. It was cold, hard, relentless and unflinching. More than that, it seemed to be endowed with a dreadful prescience, — a faculty of seeing through and into the inarticulate thoughts of those it looked upon. The soldiers of the garrison obeyed the eye rather than the voice of their commander, and answered his glance rather than his lips in questioning. The servants could not evade the ever-watchful, but cold attention that seemed to pursue them. The children of the Presidio School smirched their copy-books under the awful supervision, and poor Paquita, the prize pupil, failed utterly in that marvellous up-stroke when her patron stood beside her. Gradually distrust, suspicion, self-accusation, and timidity took the place of trust, confidence, and security throughout San Carlos. Whenever the Right Eye of the Commander fell, a shadow fell with it.

Nor was Salvatierra entirely free from the baleful influence of his miraculous acquisition. Unconscious of its effect upon others, he only saw in their actions evidence of certain things that the crafty Peleg had hinted on that eventful New Year's eve. His most trusty retainers stammered, blushed, and faltered before him. Self-accusations, confessions of minor faults and delinquencies, or

extravagant excuses and apologies met his mildest inquiries. The very children that he loved — his pet pupil, Paquita — seemed to be conscious of some hidden sin. The result of this constant irritation showed itself more plainly. For the first half-year the Commander's voice and eye were at variance. He was still kind, tender, and thoughtful in speech. Gradually, however, his voice took upon itself the hardness of his glance and its sceptical, impassive quality, and as the year again neared its close it was plain that the Commander had fitted himself to the eye, and not the eye to the Commander.

It may be surmised that these changes did not escape the watchful solicitude of the Fathers. Indeed, the few who were first to ascribe the right eye of Salvatierra to miraculous origin and the special grace of the blessed San Carlos, now talked openly of witchcraft and the agency of Luzbel, the evil one. It would have fared ill with Hermenegildo Salvatierra had he been aught but Commander or amenable to local authority. But the reverend father, Friar Manuel de Cortes, had no power over the political executive, and all attempts at spiritual advice failed signally. He retired baffled and confused from his first interview with the Commander, who seemed now to take a grim satisfaction in the fateful power of his glance. The holy father contradicted himself, exposed the fal-

lacies of his own arguments, and even, it is asserted, committed himself to several undoubted heresies. When the Commander stood up at mass, if the officiating priest caught that sceptical and searching eye, the service was inevitably ruined. Even the power of the Holy Church seemed to be lost, and the last hold upon the affections of the people and the good order of the settlement departed from San Carlos.

As the long dry summer passed, the low hills that surrounded the white walls of the Presidio grew more and more to resemble in hue the leathern jacket of the Commander, and Nature herself seemed to have borrowed his dry, hard glare. The earth was cracked and seamed with drought; a blight had fallen upon the orchards and vineyards, and the rain, long delayed and ardently prayed for, came not. The sky was as tearless as the right eye of the Commander. Murmurs of discontent, insubordination, and plotting among the Indians reached his ears; he only set his teeth the more firmly, tightened the knot of his black silk handkerchief, and looked up his Toledo.

The last day of the year 1798 found the Commander sitting, at the hour of evening prayers, alone in the guard-room. He no longer attended the services of the Holy Church, but crept away at such times to some solitary spot, where he spent the interval in silent meditation. The firelight

played upon the low beams and rafters, but left the bowed figure of Salvatierra in darkness. Sitting thus, he felt a small hand touch his arm, and, looking down, saw the figure of Paquita, his little Indian pupil, at his knee. "Ah, littlest of all," said the Commander, with something of his old tenderness, lingering over the endearing diminutives of his native speech, — "sweet one, what doest thou here? Art thou not afraid of him whom every one shuns and fears?"

"No," said the little Indian, readily, "not in the dark. I hear your voice, — the old voice; I feel your touch, — the old touch; but I see not your eye, Señor Comandante. That only I fear, — and that, O Señor, O my father," said the child, lifting her little arms towards his, — "that I know is not thine own!"

The Commander shuddered and turned away. Then, recovering himself, he kissed Paquita gravely on the forehead and bade her retire. A few hours later, when silence had fallen upon the Presidio, he sought his own couch and slept peacefully.

At about the middle watch of the night a dusky figure crept through the low embrasure of the Commander's apartment. Other figures were flitting through the parade-ground, which the Commander might have seen had he not slept so quietly. The intruder stepped noiselessly to the couch

and listened to the sleeper's deep-drawn inspiration. Something glittered in the firelight as the savage lifted his arm; another moment and the sore perplexities of Hermenegildo Salvatierra would have been over, when suddenly the savage started and fell back in a paroxysm of terror. The Commander slept peacefully, but his right eye, widely opened, fixed and unaltered, glared coldly on the would-be assassin. The man fell to the earth in a fit, and the noise awoke the sleeper.

To rise to his feet, grasp his sword, and deal blows thick and fast upon the mutinous savages who now thronged the room, was the work of a moment. Help opportunely arrived, and the undisciplined Indians were speedily driven beyond the walls, but in the scuffle the Commander received a blow upon his right eye, and, lifting his hand to that mysterious organ, it was gone. Never again was it found, and never again, for bale or bliss, did it adorn the right orbit of the Commander.

With it passed away the spell that had fallen upon San Carlos. The rain returned to invigorate the languid soil, harmony was restored between priest and soldier, the green grass presently waved over the sere hillsides, the children flocked again to the side of their martial preceptor, a *Te Deum* was sung in the Mission Church, and pastoral content once more smiled upon the gentle valleys of

San Carlos. And far southward crept the "General Court" with its master, Peleg Scudder, trafficking in beads and peltries with the Indians, and offering glass eyes, wooden legs, and other Boston notions to the chiefs.

NOTES BY FLOOD AND FIELD.

PART I. — IN THE FIELD.

IT was near the close of an October day that I began to be disagreeably conscious of the Sacramento Valley. I had been riding since sunrise, and my course through the depressing monotony of the long level landscape affected me more like a dull dyspeptic dream than a business journey, performed under that sincerest of natural phenomena, — a California sky. The recurring stretches of brown and baked fields, the gaping fissures in the dusty trail, the hard outline of the distant hills, and the herds of slowly moving cattle, seemed like features of some glittering stereoscopic picture that never changed. Active exercise might have removed this feeling, but my horse by some subtle instinct had long since given up all ambitious effort, and had lapsed into a dogged trot.

It was autumn, but not the season suggested to the Atlantic reader under that title. The sharply defined boundaries of the wet and dry seasons were prefigured in the clear outlines of the distant hills. In the dry atmosphere the decay of vegetation was

too rapid for the slow hectic which overtakes an Eastern landscape, or else Nature was too practical for such thin disguises. She merely turned the Hippocratic face to the spectator, with the old diagnosis of Death in her sharp, contracted features.

In the contemplation of such a prospect there was little to excite any but a morbid fancy. There were no clouds in the flinty blue heavens, and the setting of the sun was accompanied with as little ostentation as was consistent with the dryly practical atmosphere. Darkness soon followed, with a rising wind, which increased as the shadows deepened on the plain. The fringe of alder by the watercourse began to loom up as I urged my horse forward. A half-hour's active spurring brought me to a *corral*, and a little beyond a house, so low and broad it seemed at first sight to be half buried in the earth.

My second impression was that it had grown out of the soil, like some monstrous vegetable, its dreary proportions were so in keeping with the vast prospect. There were no recesses along its roughly boarded walls for vagrant and unprofitable shadows to lurk in the daily sunshine. No projection for the wind by night to grow musical over, to wail, whistle, or whisper to; only a long wooden shelf containing a chilly-looking tin basin, and a bar of soap. Its uncurtained windows were red with the sinking sun, as though bloodshot and

inflamed from a too long unlidded existence. The tracks of cattle led to its front door, firmly closed against the rattling wind.

To avoid being confounded with this familiar element, I walked to the rear of the house, which was connected with a smaller building by a slight platform. A grizzled, hard-faced old man was standing there, and met my salutation with a look of inquiry, and, without speaking, led the way to the principal room. As I entered, four young men who were reclining by the fire, slightly altered their attitudes of perfect repose, but beyond that betrayed neither curiosity nor interest. A hound started from a dark corner with a growl, but was immediately kicked by the old man into obscurity, and silenced again. I can't tell why, but I instantly received the impression that for a long time the group by the fire had not uttered a word or moved a muscle. Taking a seat, I briefly stated my business.

Was a United States surveyor. Had come on account of the Espíritu Santo Rancho. Wanted to correct the exterior boundaries of township lines, so as to connect with the near exteriors of private grants. There had been some intervention to the old survey by a Mr. Tryan who had pre-empted adjacent — "settled land warrants," interrupted the old man. "Ah, yes! Land Warrants, — and then this was Mr. Tryan?"

I had spoken mechanically, for I was preoccupied in connecting other public lines with private surveys, as I looked in his face. It was certainly a hard face, and reminded me of the singular effect of that mining operation known as "ground sluicing"; the harder lines of underlying character were exposed, and what were once plastic curves and soft outlines were obliterated by some powerful agency.

There was a dryness in his voice not unlike the prevailing atmosphere of the valley, as he launched into an *ex parte* statement of the contest, with a fluency, which, like the wind without, showed frequent and unrestrained expression. He told me — what I had already learned — that the boundary line of the old Spanish grant was a creek, described in the loose phraseology of the *deseño* as beginning in the *valda* or skirt of the hill, its precise location long the subject of litigation. I listened and answered with little interest, for my mind was still distracted by the wind which swept violently by the house, as well as by his odd face, which was again reflected in the resemblance that the silent group by the fire bore toward him. He was still talking, and the wind was yet blowing, when my confused attention was aroused by a remark addressed to the recumbent figures.

"Now, then, which on ye 'll see the stranger up the creek to Altascar's, to-morrow?"

There was a general movement of opposition in the group, but no decided answer.

"Kin you go, Kerg?"

"Who 's to look up stock in Strarberry per-ar-ie?"

This seemed to imply a negative, and the old man turned to another hopeful, who was pulling the fur from a mangy bear-skin on which he was lying, with an expression as though it were somebody's hair.

"Well, Tom, wot 's to hinder you from goin'?"

"Mam 's goin' to Brown's store at sun-up, and I s'pose I 've got to pack her and the baby agin."

I think the expression of scorn this unfortunate youth exhibited for the filial duty into which he had been evidently beguiled, was one of the finest things I had ever seen.

"Wise?"

Wise deigned no verbal reply, but figuratively thrust a worn and patched boot into the discourse. The old man flushed quickly.

"I told ye to get Brown to give you a pair the last time you war down the river."

"Said he would n't without'en order. Said it was like pulling gum-teeth to get the money from you even then."

There was a grim smile at this local hit at the old man's parsimony, and Wise, who was clearly the privileged wit of the family, sank back in honorable retirement.

"Well, Joe, ef your boots are new, and you are n't pestered with wimmin and children, p'r'aps you 'll go," said Tryan, with a nervous twitching, intended for a smile, about a mouth not remarkably mirthful.

Tom lifted a pair of bushy eyebrows, and said shortly, —

"Got no saddle."

"Wot 's gone of your saddle ?"

"Kerg, there," — indicating his brother with a look such as Cain might have worn at the sacrifice.

"You lie !" returned Kerg, cheerfully.

Tryan sprang to his feet, seizing the chair, flourishing it around his head and gazing furiously in the hard young faces which fearlessly met his own. But it was only for a moment; his arm soon dropped by his side, and a look of hopeless fatality crossed his face. He allowed me to take the chair from his hand, and I was trying to pacify him by the assurance that I required no guide, when the irrepressible Wise again lifted his voice : —

"Theer 's George comin' ! why don't ye ask him ? He 'll go and introduce you to Don Fernandy's darter, too, ef you ain't pertickler."

The laugh which followed this joke, which evidently had some domestic allusion (the general tendency of rural pleasantry), was followed by a light step on the platform, and the young man entered. Seeing a stranger present, he stopped and

colored; made a shy salute and colored again, and then, drawing a box from the corner, sat down, his hands clasped lightly together and his very handsome bright blue eyes turned frankly on mine.

Perhaps I was in a condition to receive the romantic impression he made upon me, and I took it upon myself to ask his company as guide, and he cheerfully assented. But some domestic duty called him presently away.

The fire gleamed brightly on the hearth, and, no longer resisting the prevailing influence, I silently watched the spirting flame, listening to the wind which continually shook the tenement. Besides the one chair which had acquired a new importance in my eyes, I presently discovered a crazy table in one corner, with an ink-bottle and pen; the latter in that greasy state of decomposition peculiar to country taverns and farm-houses. A goodly array of rifles and double-barrelled guns stocked the corner; half a dozen saddles and blankets lay near, with a mild flavor of the horse about them. Some deer and bear skins completed the inventory. As I sat there, with the silent group around me, the shadowy gloom within and the dominant wind without, I found it difficult to believe I had ever known a different existence. My profession had often led me to wilder scenes, but rarely among those whose unrestrained habits and easy unconsciousness made me feel so lonely and uncomfort-

able. I shrank closer to myself, not without grave doubts — which I think occur naturally to people in like situations — that this was the general rule of humanity, and I was a solitary and somewhat gratuitous exception.

It was a relief when a laconic announcement of supper by a weak-eyed girl caused a general movement in the family. We walked across the dark platform, which led to another low-ceiled room. Its entire length was occupied by a table, at the farther end of which a weak-eyed woman was already taking her repast, as she, at the same time, gave nourishment to a weak-eyed baby. As the formalities of introduction had been dispensed with, and as she took no notice of me, I was enabled to slip into a seat without discomposing or interrupting her. Tryan extemporized a grace, and the attention of the family became absorbed in bacon, potatoes, and dried apples.

The meal was a sincere one. Gentle gurglings at the upper end of the table often betrayed the presence of the "wellspring of pleasure." The conversation generally referred to the labors of the day, and comparing notes as to the whereabouts of missing stock. Yet the supper was such a vast improvement upon the previous intellectual feast, that when a chance allusion of mine to the business of my visit brought out the elder Tryan, the interest grew quite exciting. I remember he in-

veighed bitterly against the system of ranch-holding by the "greasers," as he was pleased to term the native Californians. As the same ideas have been sometimes advanced under more pretentious circumstances, they may be worthy of record.

"Look at 'em holdin' the finest grazin' land that ever lay outer doors? Whar's the papers for it? Was it grants? Mighty fine grants, — most of 'em made arter the 'Merrikans got possession. More fools the 'Merrikans for lettin' 'em hold 'em. Wat paid for 'em? 'Merrikan blood and money.

"Did n't they oughter have suthin out of their native country? Wot for? Did they ever improve? Got a lot of yaller-skinned diggers, not so sensible as niggers to look arter stock, and they a sittin' home and smokin'. With their gold and silver candlesticks, and missions, and crucifixens, priests and graven idols, and sich? Them sort things wurent allowed in Mizzoori."

At the mention of improvements, I involuntarily lifted my eyes, and met the half-laughing, half-embarrassed look of George. The act did not escape detection, and I had at once the satisfaction of seeing that the rest of the family had formed an offensive alliance against us.

"It was agin Nater, and agin God," added Tryan. "God never intended gold in the rocks to be made into heathen candlesticks and crucifixens. That's why he sent 'Merrikins here. Nater never

intended such a climate for lazy lopers. She never gin six months' sunshine to be slept and smoked away."

How long he continued, and with what further illustration I could not say, for I took an early opportunity to escape to the sitting-room. I was soon followed by George, who called me to an open door leading to a smaller room, and pointed to a bed.

"You 'd better sleep there to-night," he said; "you 'll be more comfortable, and I 'll call you early."

I thanked him, and would have asked him several questions which were then troubling me, but he shyly slipped to the door and vanished.

A shadow seemed to fall on the room when he had gone. The "boys" returned, one by one, and shuffled to their old places. A larger log was thrown on the fire, and the huge chimney glowed like a furnace, but it did not seem to melt or subdue a single line of the hard faces that it lit. In half an hour later, the furs which had served as chairs by day undertook the nightly office of mattresses, and each received its owner's full-length figure. Mr. Tryan had not returned, and I missed George. I sat there, until, wakeful and nervous, I saw the fire fall and shadows mount the wall. There was no sound but the rushing of the wind and the snoring of the sleepers. At last, feeling

the place insupportable, I seized my hat and, opening the door, ran out briskly into the night.

The acceleration of my torpid pulse in the keen fight with the wind, whose violence was almost equal to that of a tornado, and the familiar faces of the bright stars above me, I felt as a blessed relief. I ran not knowing whither, and when I halted, the square outline of the house was lost in the alder-bushes. An uninterrupted plain stretched before me, like a vast sea beaten flat by the force of the gale. As I kept on I noticed a slight elevation toward the horizon, and presently my progress was impeded by the ascent of an Indian mound. It struck me forcibly as resembling an island in the sea. Its height gave me a better view of the expanding plain. But even here I found no rest. The ridiculous interpretation Tryan had given the climate was somehow sung in my ears, and echoed in my throbbing pulse, as, guided by the star, I sought the house again.

But I felt fresher and more natural as I stepped upon the platform. The door of the lower building was open, and the old man was sitting beside the table, thumbing the leaves of a Bible with a look in his face as though he were hunting up prophecies against the "Greaser." I turned to enter, but my attention was attracted by a blanketed figure lying beside the house, on the platform. The broad chest heaving with healthy slumber,

and the open, honest face were familiar. It was George, who had given up his bed to the stranger among his people. I was about to wake him, but he lay so peaceful and quiet, I felt awed and hushed. And I went to bed with a pleasant impression of his handsome face and tranquil figure soothing me to sleep.

I was awakened the next morning from a sense of lulled repose and grateful silence by the cheery voice of George, who stood beside my bed, ostentatiously twirling a "riata," as if to recall the duties of the day to my sleep-bewildered eyes. I looked around me. The wind had been magically laid, and the sun shone warmly through the windows. A dash of cold water, with an extra chill on from the tin basin, helped to brighten me. It was still early, but the family had already breakfasted and dispersed, and a wagon winding far in the distance showed that the unfortunate Tom had already "packed" his relatives away. I felt more cheerful, — there are few troubles Youth cannot distance with the start of a good night's rest. After a substantial breakfast, prepared by George, in a few moments we were mounted and dashing down the plain.

We followed the line of alder that defined the creek, now dry and baked with summer's heat, but which in winter, George told me, overflowed

its banks. I still retain a vivid impression of that morning's ride, the far-off mountains, like *silhouettes*, against the steel-blue sky, the crisp dry air, and the expanding track before me, animated often by the well-knit figure of George Tryan, musical with jingling spurs, and picturesque with flying "riata." He rode a powerful native roan, wild-eyed, untiring in stride and unbroken in nature. Alas! the curves of beauty were concealed by the cumbrous *machillas* of the Spanish saddle, which levels all equine distinctions. The single rein lay loosely on the cruel bit that can gripe, and, if need be, crush the jaw it controls.

Again the illimitable freedom of the valley rises before me, as we again bear down into sunlit space. Can this be "Chu-Chu," staid and respectable filly of American pedigree, — "Chu-Chu," forgetful of plank-roads and cobble-stones, wild with excitement, twinkling her small white feet beneath me? George laughs out of a cloud of dust, "Give her her head; don't you see she likes it?" and "Chu-Chu" seems to like it, and, whether bitten by native tarantula into native barbarism or emulous of the roan, "blood" asserts itself, and in a moment the peaceful servitude of years is beaten out in the music of her clattering hoofs. The creek widens to a deep gully. We dive into it and up on the opposite side, carrying a moving cloud of impalpable powder with us. Cattle are

scattered over the plain, grazing quietly, or banded together in vast restless herds. George makes a wide, indefinite sweep with the "riata," as if to include them all in his *vaquero's* loop, and says, "Ours!"

"About how many, George?"

"Don't know."

"How many?"

"Well, p'r'aps three thousand head," says George, reflecting. "We don't know, takes five men to look 'em up and keep run."

"What are they worth?"

"About thirty dollars a head."

I make a rapid calculation, and look my astonishment at the laughing George. Perhaps a recollection of the domestic economy of the Tryan household is expressed in that look, for George averts his eye and says, apologetically, —

"I 've tried to get the old man to sell and build, but you know he says it ain't no use to settle down, just yet. We must keep movin'. In fact, he built the shanty for that purpose, lest titles should fall through, and we 'd have to get up and move stakes further down."

Suddenly his quick eye detects some unusual sight in a herd we are passing, and with an exclamation he puts his roan into the centre of the mass. I follow, or rather "Chu-Chu" darts after the roan, and in a few moments we are in the

midst of apparently inextricable horns and hoofs. "Toro!" shouts George, with vaquero enthusiasm, and the band opens a way for the swinging "riata." I can feel their steaming breaths, and their spume is cast on "Chu-Chu's" quivering flank.

Wild, devilish-looking beasts are they; not such shapes as Jove might have chosen to woo a goddess, nor such as peacefully range the downs of Devon, but lean and hungry Cassius-like bovines, economically got up to meet the exigencies of a six months' rainless climate, and accustomed to wrestle with the distracting wind and the blinding dust.

"That 's not our brand," says George; "they 're strange stock," and he points to what my scientific eye recognizes as the astrological sign of Venus deeply seared in the brown flanks of the bull he is chasing. But the herd are closing round us with low mutterings, and George has again recourse to the authoritative "Toro," and with swinging "riata" divides the "bossy bucklers" on either side. When we are free, and breathing somewhat more easily, I venture to ask George if they ever attack any one.

"Never horsemen, — sometimes footmen. Not through rage, you know, but curiosity. They think a man and his horse are one, and if they meet a chap afoot, they run him down and trample him under hoof, in the pursuit of knowledge. But,"

adds George, "here 's the lower bench of the foot-hills, and here 's Altascar's corral, and that white building you see yonder is the *casa*."

A whitewashed wall enclosed a court containing another adobe building, baked with the solar beams of many summers. Leaving our horses in the charge of a few peons in the courtyard, who were basking lazily in the sun, we entered a low doorway, where a deep shadow and an agreeable coolness fell upon us, as sudden and grateful as a plunge in cool water, from its contrast with the external glare and heat. In the centre of a low-ceiled apartment sat an old man with a black silk handkerchief tied about his head; the few gray hairs that escaped from its folds relieving his gamboge-colored face. The odor of cigarritos was as incense added to the cathedral gloom of the building.

As Señor Altascar rose with well-bred gravity to receive us, George advanced with such a heightened color, and such a blending of tenderness and respect in his manner, that I was touched to the heart by so much devotion in the careless youth. In fact, my eyes were still dazzled by the effect of the outer sunshine, and at first I did not see the white teeth and black eyes of Pepita, who slipped into the corridor as we entered.

It was no pleasant matter to disclose particulars of business which would deprive the old Señor of the greater part of that land we had just ridden

over, and I did it with great embarrassment. But he listened calmly, — not a muscle of his dark face stirring, — and the smoke curling placidly from his lips showed his regular respiration. When I had finished, he offered quietly to accompany us to the line of demarcation. George had meanwhile disappeared, but a suspicious conversation in broken Spanish and English, in the corridor, betrayed his vicinity. When he returned again, a little absent-minded, the old man, by far the coolest and most self-possessed of the party, extinguished his black silk cap beneath that stiff, uncomely *sombrero* which all native Californians affect. A *serapa* thrown over his shoulders hinted that he was waiting. Horses are always ready saddled in Spanish ranchos, and in half an hour from the time of our arrival we were again "loping" in the staring sunlight.

But not as cheerfully as before. George and myself were weighed down by restraint, and Altascar was gravely quiet. To break the silence, and by way of a consolatory essay, I hinted to him that there might be further intervention or appeal, but the proffered oil and wine were returned with a careless shrug of the shoulders and a sententious "*Que bueno?* — Your courts are always just."

The Indian mound of the previous night's discovery was a bearing monument of the new line

and there we halted. We were surprised to find the old man Tryan waiting us. For the first time during our interview the old Spaniard seemed moved, and the blood rose in his yellow cheek. I was anxious to close the scene, and pointed out the corner boundaries as clearly as my recollection served.

"The deputies will be here to-morrow to run the lines from this initial point, and there will be no further trouble, I believe, gentlemen."

Señor Altascar had dismounted and was gathering a few tufts of dried grass in his hands. George and I exchanged glances. He presently arose from his stooping posture, and, advancing to within a few paces of Joseph Tryan, said, in a voice broken with passion, —

"And I, Fernando Jesus Maria Altascar, put you in possession of my land in the fashion of my country."

He threw a sod to each of the cardinal points.

"I don't know your courts, your judges, or your *corregidores*. Take the *llano!* — and take this with it. May the drought seize your cattle till their tongues hang down as long as those of your lying lawyers! May it be the curse and torment of your old age, as you and yours have made it of mine!"

We stepped between the principal actors in this scene, which only the passion of Altascar made

tragical, but Tryan, with a humility but ill concealing his triumph, interrupted: —

"Let him curse on. He 'll find 'em coming home to him sooner than the cattle he has lost through his sloth and pride. The Lord is on the side of the just, as well as agin all slanderers and revilers."

Altascar but half guessed the meaning of the Missourian, yet sufficiently to drive from his mind all but the extravagant power of his native invective.

"Stealer of the Sacrament! Open not! — open not, I say, your lying, Judas lips to me! Ah! half-breed, with the soul of a cayote! — Car-r-r-ramba!"

With his passion reverberating among the consonants like distant thunder, he laid his hand upon the mane of his horse as though it had been the gray locks of his adversary, swung himself into the saddle and galloped away.

George turned to me: —

"Will you go back with us to-night?"

I thought of the cheerless walls, the silent figures by the fire, and the roaring wind, and hesitated.

"Well then, good by."

"Good by, George."

Another wring of the hands, and we parted. I had not ridden far, when I turned and looked back. The wind had risen early that afternoon, and was

already sweeping across the plain. A cloud of dust travelled before it, and a picturesque figure occasionally emerging therefrom was my last indistinct impression of George Tryan.

PART II. — IN THE FLOOD.

THREE months after the survey of the Espíritu Santo Rancho, I was again in the valley of the Sacramento. But a general and terrible visitation had erased the memory of that event as completely as I supposed it had obliterated the boundary monuments I had planted. The great flood of 1861–62 was at its height, when, obeying some indefinite yearning, I took my carpet-bag and embarked for the inundated valley.

There was nothing to be seen from the bright cabin windows of the "Golden City" but night deepening over the water. The only sound was the pattering rain, and that had grown monotonous for the past two weeks, and did not disturb the national gravity of my countrymen as they silently sat around the cabin stove. Some on errands of relief to friends and relatives wore anxious faces, and conversed soberly on the one absorbing topic. Others, like myself, attracted by curiosity, listened eagerly to newer details. But

with that human disposition to seize upon any circumstance that might give chance event the exaggerated importance of instinct, I was half conscious of something more than curiosity as an impelling motive.

The dripping of rain, the low gurgle of water, and a leaden sky greeted us the next morning as we lay beside the half-submerged levee of Sacramento. Here, however, the novelty of boats to convey us to the hotels was an appeal that was irresistible. I resigned myself to a dripping rubber-cased mariner called "Joe," and, wrapping myself in a shining cloak of the like material, about as suggestive of warmth as court-plaster might have been, took my seat in the stern-sheets of his boat. It was no slight inward struggle to part from the steamer, that to most of the passengers was the only visible connecting link between us and the dry and habitable earth, but we pulled away and entered the city, stemming a rapid current as we shot the levee.

We glided up the long level of K Street, — once a cheerful, busy thoroughfare, now distressing in its silent desolation. The turbid water which seemed to meet the horizon edge before us flowed at right angles in sluggish rivers through the streets. Nature had revenged herself on the local taste by disarraying the regular rectangles by huddling houses on street corners, where they presented

abrupt gables to the current, or by capsizing them in compact ruin. Crafts of all kinds were gliding in and out of low-arched doorways. The water was over the top of the fences surrounding well-kept gardens, in the first stories of hotels and private dwellings, trailing its slime on velvet carpets as well as roughly boarded floors. And a silence quite as suggestive as the visible desolation was in the voiceless streets that no longer echoed to carriage-wheel or footfall. The low ripple of water, the occasional splash of oars, or the warning cry of boatmen were the few signs of life and habitation.

With such scenes before my eyes and such sounds in my ears, as I lie lazily in the boat, is mingled the song of my gondolier who sings to the music of his oars. It is not quite as romantic as his brother of the Lido might improvise, but my Yankee "Giuseppe" has the advantage of earnestness and energy, and gives a graphic description of the terrors of the past week and of noble deeds of self-sacrifice and devotion, occasionally pointing out a balcony from which some California Bianca or Laura had been snatched, half clothed and famished. Giuseppe is otherwise peculiar, and refuses the proffered fare, for — am I not a citizen of San Francisco, which was first to respond to the suffering cry of Sacramento? and is not he, Giuseppe, a member of the Howard Society? No!

Giuseppe is poor, but cannot take my money. Still, if I must spend it, there is the Howard Society, and the women and children without food and clothes at the Agricultural Hall.

I thank the generous gondolier, and we go to the Hall, — a dismal, bleak place, ghastly with the memories of last year's opulence and plenty, and here Giuseppe's fare is swelled by the stranger's mite. But here Giuseppe tells me of the "Relief Boat" which leaves for the flooded district in the interior, and here, profiting by the lesson he has taught me, I make the resolve to turn my curiosity to the account of others, and am accepted of those who go forth to succor and help the afflicted. Giuseppe takes charge of my carpet-bag, and does not part from me until I stand on the slippery deck of "Relief Boat No. 3."

An hour later I am in the pilot-house, looking down upon what was once the channel of a peaceful river. But its banks are only defined by tossing tufts of willow washed by the long swell that breaks over a vast inland sea. Stretches of "tule" land fertilized by its once regular channel and dotted by flourishing ranchos are now cleanly erased. The cultivated profile of the old landscape had faded. Dotted lines in symmetrical perspective mark orchards that are buried and chilled in the turbid flood. The roofs of a few farm-houses are visible, and here and there the

smoke curling from chimneys of half-submerged tenements show an undaunted life within. Cattle and sheep are gathered on Indian mounds waiting the fate of their companions whose carcasses drift by us, or swing in eddies with the wrecks of barns and out-houses. Wagons are stranded everywhere where the tide could carry them. As I wipe the moistened glass, I see nothing but water, pattering on the deck from the lowering clouds, dashing against the window, dripping from the willows, hissing by the wheels, everywhere washing, coiling, sapping, hurrying in rapids, or swelling at last into deeper and vaster lakes, awful in their suggestive quiet and concealment.

As day fades into night the monotony of this strange prospect grows oppressive. I seek the engine-room, and in the company of some of the few half-drowned sufferers we have already picked up from temporary rafts, I forget the general aspect of desolation in their individual misery. Later we meet the San Francisco packet, and transfer a number of our passengers. From them we learn how inward-bound vessels report to having struck the well-defined channel of the Sacramento, fifty miles beyond the bar. There is a voluntary contribution taken among the generous travellers for the use of our afflicted, and we part company with a hearty "God speed" on either side. But our signal-lights are not far dis-

tant before a familiar sound comes back to us, — an indomitable Yankee cheer, — which scatters the gloom.

Our course is altered, and we are steaming over the obliterated banks far in the interior. Once or twice black objects loom up near us, — the wrecks of houses floating by. There is a slight rift in the sky towards the north, and a few bearing stars to guide us over the waste. As we penetrate into shallower water, it is deemed advisable to divide our party into smaller boats, and diverge over the submerged prairie. I borrow a pea-coat of one of the crew, and in that practical disguise am doubtfully permitted to pass into one of the boats. We give way northerly. It is quite dark yet, although the rift of cloud has widened.

It must have been about three o'clock, and we were lying upon our oars in an eddy formed by a clump of cottonwood, and the light of the steamer is a solitary, bright star in the distance, when the silence is broken by the "bow oar": —

"Light ahead."

All eyes are turned in that direction. In a few seconds a twinkling light appears, shines steadily, and again disappears as if by the shifting position of some black object apparently drifting close upon us.

"Stern, all; a steamer!"

"Hold hard there! Steamer be d—d!" is the

reply of the coxswain. "It 's a house, and a big one too."

It is a big one, looming in the starlight like a huge fragment of the darkness. The light comes from a single candle, which shines through a window as the great shape swings by. Some recollection is drifting back to me with it, as I listen with beating heart.

"There 's some one in it, by Heavens! Give way, boys, — lay her alongside. Handsomely, now! The door 's fastened; try the window; no! here 's another!"

In another moment we are trampling in the water, which washes the floor to the depth of several inches. It is a large room, at the further end of which an old man is sitting wrapped in a blanket, holding a candle in one hand, and apparently absorbed in the book he holds with the other. I spring toward him with an exclamation: —

"Joseph Tryan!"

He does not move. We gather closer to him, and I lay my hand gently on his shoulder, and say: —

"Look up, old man, look up! Your wife and children, where are they? The boys, — George! Are they here? are they safe?"

He raises his head slowly, and turns his eyes to mine, and we involuntarily recoil before his look.

It is a calm and quiet glance, free from fear, anger, or pain; but it somehow sends the blood curdling through our veins. He bowed his head over his book again, taking no further notice of us. The men look at me compassionately, and hold their peace. I make one more effort: —

"Joseph Tryan, don't you know me? the surveyor who surveyed your ranch, — the Espíritu Santo? Look up, old man!"

He shuddered and wrapped himself closer in his blanket. Presently he repeated to himself, "The surveyor who surveyed your ranch, — Espíritu Santo," over and over again, as though it were a lesson he was trying to fix in his memory.

I was turning sadly to the boatmen, when he suddenly caught me fearfully by the hand and said, —

"Hush!"

We were silent.

"Listen!" He puts his arm around my neck and whispers in my ear, "I 'm a *moving off!*"

"Moving off?"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. Moving off. Ah! wot 's that? Don't you hear? — there! listen!"

We listen, and hear the water gurgle and click beneath the floor.

"It 's them wot he sent! — Old Altascar sent. They 've been here all night. I heard 'em first in

the creek, when they came to tell the old man to move farther off. They came nearer and nearer. They whispered under the door, and I saw their eyes on the step, — their cruel, hard eyes. Ah, why don't they quit?"

I tell the men to search the room and see if they can find any further traces of the family, while Tryan resumes his old attitude. It is so much like the figure I remember on the breezy night that a superstitious feeling is fast overcoming me. When they have returned, I tell them briefly what I know of him, and the old man murmurs again, —

"Why don't they quit, then? They have the stock, — all gone — gone, gone for the hides and hoofs," and he groans bitterly.

"There are other boats below us. The shanty cannot have drifted far, and perhaps the family are safe by this time," says the coxswain, hopefully.

We lift the old man up, for he is quite helpless, and carry him to the boat. He is still grasping the Bible in his right hand, though its strengthening grace is blank to his vacant eye, and he cowers in the stern as we pull slowly to the steamer, while a pale gleam in the sky shows the coming day.

I was weary with excitement, and when we reached the steamer, and I had seen Joseph Tryan comfortably bestowed, I wrapped myself in a blanket near the boiler and presently fell asleep. But even then the figure of the old man often started

before me, and a sense of uneasiness about George made a strong undercurrent to my drifting dreams. I was awakened at about eight o'clock in the morning by the engineer, who told me one of the old man's sons had been picked up and was now on board.

"Is it George Tryan?" I ask quickly.

"Don't know; but he 's a sweet one, whoever he is," adds the engineer, with a smile at some luscious remembrance. "You 'll find him for'ard."

I hurry to the bow of the boat, and find, not George, but the irrepressible Wise, sitting on a coil of rope, a little dirtier and rather more dilapidated than I can remember having seen him.

He is examining, with apparent admiration, some rough, dry clothes that have been put out for his disposal. I cannot help thinking that circumstances have somewhat exalted his usual cheerfulness. He puts me at my ease by at once addressing me: —

"These are high old times, ain't they? I say, what do you reckon 's become o' them thar bound'ry moniments you stuck? Ah!"

The pause which succeeds this outburst is the effect of a spasm of admiration at a pair of high boots, which, by great exertion, he has at last pulled on his feet.

"So you 've picked up the ole man in the shanty, clean crazy? He must have been soft

to have stuck there instead o' leavin' with the old woman. Did n't know me from Adam; took me for George!"

At this affecting instance of paternal forgetfulness, Wise was evidently divided between amusement and chagrin. I took advantage of the contending emotions to ask about George.

"Don't know whar he is! If he 'd tended stock instead of running about the prairie, packin' off wimmin and children, he might have saved suthin. He lost every hoof and hide, I 'll bet a cookey! Say you," to a passing boatman, "when are you goin' to give us some grub? I 'm hungry 'nough to skin and eat a hoss. Reckon I 'll turn butcher when things is dried up, and save hides, horns, and taller."

I could not but admire this indomitable energy, which under softer climatic influences might have borne such goodly fruit.

"Have you any idea what you 'll do, Wise?" I ask.

"Thar ain't much to do now," says the practical young man. "I 'll have to lay over a spell, I reckon, till things comes straight. The land ain't worth much now, and won't be, I dessay, for some time. Wonder whar the ole man 'll drive stakes next."

"I meant as to your father and George, Wise."

"O, the ole man and I 'll go on to 'Miles's,' whar

Tom packed the old woman and babies last week George 'll turn up somewhar atween this and Altascar's, ef he ain't thar now."

I ask how the Altascars have suffered.

"Well, I reckon he ain't lost much in stock. I should n't wonder if George helped him drive 'em up the foot-hills. And his 'casa' 's built too high. O, thar ain't any water thar, you bet. Ah," says Wise, with reflective admiration, "those greasers ain't the darned fools people thinks 'em. I 'll bet thar ain't one swamped out in all 'er Californy." But the appearance of "grub," cut this rhapsody short.

"I shall keep on a little farther," I say, "and try to find George."

Wise stared a moment at this eccentricity until a new light dawned upon him.

"I don't think you 'll save much. What 's the percentage, — workin' on shares, eh!"

I answer that I am only curious, which I feel lessens his opinion of me, and with a sadder feeling than his assurance of George's safety might warrant, I walked away.

From others whom we picked up from time to time we heard of George's self-sacrificing devotion, with the praises of the many he had helped and rescued. But I did not feel disposed to return until I had seen him, and soon prepared myself to take a boat to the lower "valda" of the

foot-hills, and visit Altascar. I soon perfected my arrangements, bade farewell to Wise, and took a last look at the old man, who was sitting by the furnace-fires quite passive and composed. Then our boat-head swung round, pulled by sturdy and willing hands.

It was again raining, and a disagreeable wind had risen. Our course lay nearly west, and we soon knew by the strong current that we were in the creek of the Espíritu Santo. From time to time the wrecks of barns were seen, and we passed many half-submerged willows hung with farming implements.

We emerge at last into a broad silent sea. It is the "llano de Espíritu Santo." As the wind whistles by me, piling the shallower fresh water into mimic waves, I go back, in fancy, to the long ride of October over that boundless plain, and recall the sharp outlines of the distant hills which are now lost in the lowering clouds. The men are rowing silently, and I find my mind, released from its tension, growing benumbed and depressed as then. The water, too, is getting more shallow as we leave the banks of the creek, and with my hand dipped listlessly over the thwarts, I detect the tops of chimisal, which shows the tide to have somewhat fallen. There is a black mound, bearing to the north of the line of alder, making an adverse current, which, as we sweep to the right to

avoid, I recognize. We pull close alongside and I call to the men to stop.

There was a stake driven near its summit with the initials, "L. E. S. I." Tied half-way down was a curiously worked "riata." It was George's. It had been cut with some sharp instrument, and the loose gravelly soil of the mound was deeply dented with horse's hoofs. The stake was covered with horse-hairs. It was a record, but no clew.

The wind had grown more violent, as we still fought our way forward, resting and rowing by turns, and oftener "poling" the shallower surface, but the old "valda," or bench, is still distant. My recollection of the old survey enables me to guess the relative position of the meanderings of the creek, and an occasional simple professional experiment to determine the distance gives my crew the fullest faith in my ability. Night overtakes us in our impeded progress. Our condition looks more dangerous than it really is, but I urge the men, many of whom are still new in this mode of navigation, to greater exertion by assurance of perfect safety and speedy relief ahead. We go on in this way until about eight o'clock, and ground by the willows. We have a muddy walk for a few hundred yards before we strike a dry trail, and simultaneously the white walls of Altascar's appear like a snow-bank before us. Lights are moving in the courtyard; but otherwise the old tomb-like repose characterizes the building.

One of the peons recognized me as I entered the court, and Altascar met me on the corridor.

I was too weak to do more than beg his hospitality for the men who had dragged wearily with me. He looked at my hand, which still unconsciously held the broken "riata." I began, wearily, to tell him about George and my fears, but with a gentler courtesy than was even his wont, he gravely laid his hand on my shoulder.

"*Poco a poco* Señor, — not now. You are tired, you have hunger, you have cold. Necessary it is you should have peace."

He took us into a small room and poured out some French cognac, which he gave to the men that had accompanied me. They drank and threw themselves before the fire in the larger room. The repose of the building was intensified that night, and I even fancied that the footsteps on the corridor were lighter and softer. The old Spaniard's habitual gravity was deeper; we might have been shut out from the world as well as the whistling storm, behind those ancient walls with their time-worn inheritor.

Before I could repeat my inquiry he retired. In a few minutes two smoking dishes of "chupa" with coffee were placed before us, and my men ate ravenously. I drank the coffee, but my excitement and weariness kept down the instincts of hunger.

I was sitting sadly by the fire when he re-entered.

"You have eat?"

I said, "Yes," to please him.

"*Bueno*, eat when you can, — food and appetite are not always."

He said this with that Sancho-like simplicity with which most of his countrymen utter a proverb, as though it were an experience rather than a legend, and, taking the "riata" from the floor, held it almost tenderly before him.

"It was made by me, Señor."

"I kept it as a clew to him, Don Altascar," I said. "If I could find him —"

"He is here."

"Here! and" — but I could not say, "well!" I understood the gravity of the old man's face, the hushed footfalls, the tomb-like repose of the building in an electric flash of consciousness; I held the clew to the broken riata at last. Altascar took my hand, and we crossed the corridor to a sombre apartment. A few tall candles were burning in sconces before the window.

In an alcove there was a deep bed with its counterpane, pillows, and sheets heavily edged with lace, in all that splendid luxury which the humblest of these strange people lavish upon this single item of their household. I stepped beside it and saw George lying, as I had seen him once

before, peacefully at rest. But a greater sacrifice than that he had known was here, and his generous heart was stilled forever.

"He was honest and brave," said the old man, and turned away.

There was another figure in the room; a heavy shawl drawn over her graceful outline, and her long black hair hiding the hands that buried her downcast face. I did not seem to notice her, and, retiring presently, left the loving and loved together.

When we were again beside the crackling fire, in the shifting shadows of the great chamber, Altascar told me how he had that morning met the horse of George Tryan swimming on the prairie; how that, farther on, he found him lying, quite cold and dead, with no marks or bruises on his person; that he had probably become exhausted in fording the creek, and that he had as probably reached the mound only to die for want of that help he had so freely given to others; that, as a last act, he had freed his horse. These incidents were corroborated by many who collected in the great chamber that evening, — women and children, — most of them succored through the devoted energies of him who lay cold and lifeless above.

He was buried in the Indian mound, — the single spot of strange perennial greenness, which

the poor aborigines had raised above the dusty plain. A little slab of sandstone with the initials "G. T." is his monument, and one of the bearings of the initial corner of the new survey of the "Espíritu Santo Rancho."

BOHEMIAN PAPERS.

THE MISSION DOLORES.

THE Mission Dolores is destined to be "The Last Sigh" of the native Californian. When the last "Greaser" shall indolently give way to the bustling Yankee, I can imagine he will, like the Moorish King, ascend one of the Mission hills to take his last lingering look at the hilled city. For a long time he will cling tenaciously to Pacific Street. He will delve in the rocky fastnesses of Telegraph Hill until progress shall remove it. He will haunt Vallejo Street, and those back slums which so vividly typify the degradation of a people; but he will eventually make way for improvement. The Mission will be last to drop from his nerveless fingers.

As I stand here this pleasant afternoon, looking up at the old chapel, — its ragged senility contrasting with the smart spring sunshine, its two gouty pillars with the plaster dropping away like tattered bandages, its rayless windows, its crumbling entrances, the leper spots on its whitewashed wall eating through the dark adobe, — I give the poor old mendicant but a few years longer to sit by the highway and ask alms in the names of the

blessed saints. Already the vicinity is haunted with the shadow of its dissolution. The shriek of the locomotive discords with the Angelus bell. An Episcopal church, of a green Gothic type, with massive buttresses of Oregon pine, even now mocks its hoary age with imitation and supplants it with a sham. Vain, alas! were those rural accessories, the nurseries and market-gardens, that once gathered about its walls and resisted civic encroachment. They, too, are passing away. Even those queer little adobe buildings with tiled roofs like longitudinal slips of cinnamon, and walled enclosures sacredly guarding a few bullock horns and strips of hide. I look in vain for the half-reclaimed Mexican, whose respectability stopped at his waist, and whose red sash under his vest was the utter undoing of his black broadcloth. I miss, too, those black-haired women, with swaying unstable busts, whose dresses were always unseasonable in texture and pattern; whose wearing of a shawl was a terrible awakening from the poetic dream of the Spanish mantilla. Traces of another nationality are visible. The railroad "navvy" has builded his shanty near the chapel, and smokes his pipe in the Posada. Gutturals have taken the place of linguals and sibilants; I miss the half-chanted, half-drawled cadences that used to mingle with the cheery "All aboard" of the stage-driver, in those good old days when the stages ran hourly to the Mission, and a

trip thither was an excursion. At the very gates of the temple, in the place of those "who sell doves for sacrifice," a vender of mechanical spiders has halted with his unhallowed wares. Even the old Padre — last type of the Missionary, and descendant of the good Junipero — I cannot find to-day; in his stead a light-haired Celt is reading a lesson from a Vulgate that is wonderfully replete with double r's. Gentle priest, in thy R-isons, let the stranger and heretic be remembered.

I open a little gate and enter the Mission Churchyard. There is no change here, though perhaps the graves lie closer together. A willow-tree, growing beside the deep, brown wall, has burst into tufted plumes in the fulness of spring. The tall grass-blades over each mound show a strange quickening of the soil below. It is pleasanter here than on the bleak mountain seaward, where distracting winds continually bring the strife and turmoil of the ocean. The Mission hills lovingly embrace the little cemetery, whose decorative taste is less ostentatious. The foreign flavor is strong; here are never-failing garlands of *immortelles*, with their sepulchral spicery; here are little cheap medallions of pewter, with the adornment of three black tears, that would look like the three of clubs, but that the simple humility of the inscription counterbalances all sense of the ridiculous. Here are children's graves with guardian angels of great

specific gravity; but here, too, are the little one's toys in a glass case beside them. Here is the average quantity of execrable original verses; but one stanza — over a sailor's grave — is striking, for it expresses a hope of salvation through the "Lord High Admiral Christ"! Over the foreign graves there is a notable lack of scriptural quotation, and an increase, if I may say it, of humanity and tenderness. I cannot help thinking that too many of my countrymen are influenced by a morbid desire to make a practical point of this occasion, and are too apt hastily to crowd a whole life of omission into the culminating act. But when I see the gray *immortelles* crowning a tombstone, I know I shall find the mysteries of the resurrection shown rather in symbols, and only the love taught in His new commandment left for the graphic touch. But "they manage these things better in France."

During my purposeless ramble the sun has been steadily climbing the brown wall of the church, and the air seems to grow cold and raw. The bright green dies out of the grass, and the rich bronze comes down from the wall. The willow-tree seems half inclined to doff its plumes, and wears the dejected air of a broken faith and violated trust. The spice of the *immortelles* mixes with the incense that steals through the open win-

dow. Within, the barbaric gilt and crimson look cold and cheap in this searching air; by this light the church certainly is old and ugly. I cannot help wondering whether the old Fathers, if they ever revisit the scene of their former labors, in their larger comprehensions, view with regret the impending change, or mourn over the day when the Mission Dolores shall appropriately come to grief.

JOHN CHINAMAN.

THE expression of the Chinese face in the aggregate is neither cheerful nor happy. In an acquaintance of half a dozen years, I can only recall one or two exceptions to this rule. There is an abiding consciousness of degradation, — a secret pain or self-humiliation visible in the lines of the mouth and eye. Whether it is only a modification of Turkish gravity, or whether it is the dread Valley of the Shadow of the Drug through which they are continually straying, I cannot say. They seldom smile, and their laughter is of such an extraordinary and sardonic nature — so purely a mechanical spasm, quite independent of any mirthful attribute — that to this day I am doubtful whether I ever saw a Chinaman laugh. A theatrical representation by natives, one might think, would have set my mind at ease on this point; but it did not. Indeed, a new difficulty presented itself, — the impossibility of determining whether the performance was a tragedy or farce. I thought I detected the low comedian in an active youth who turned two somersaults, and knocked everybody down on entering the

stage. But, unfortunately, even this classic resemblance to the legitimate farce of our civilization was deceptive. Another brocaded actor, who represented the hero of the play, turned three somersaults, and not only upset my theory and his fellow-actors at the same time, but apparently run a-muck behind the scenes for some time afterward. I looked around at the glinting white teeth to observe the effect of these two palpable hits. They were received with equal acclamation, and apparently equal facial spasms. One or two beheadings which enlivened the play produced the same sardonic effect, and left upon my mind a painful anxiety to know what was the serious business of life in China. It was noticeable, however, that my unrestrained laughter had a discordant effect, and that triangular eyes sometimes turned ominously toward the "Fanqui devil"; but as I retired discreetly before the play was finished, there were no serious results. I have only given the above as an instance of the impossibility of deciding upon the outward and superficial expression of Chinese mirth. Of its inner and deeper existence I have some private doubts. An audience that will view with a serious aspect the hero, after a frightful and agonizing death, get up and quietly walk off the stage, cannot be said to have remarkable perceptions of the ludicrous.

I have often been struck with the delicate pliability of the Chinese expression and taste, that might suggest a broader and deeper criticism than is becoming these pages. A Chinaman will adopt the American costume, and wear it with a taste of color and detail that will surpass those "native, and to the manner born." To look at a Chinese slipper, one might imagine it impossible to shape the original foot to anything less cumbrous and roomy, yet a neater-fitting boot than that belonging to the Americanized Chinaman is rarely seen on this side of the Continent. When the loose sack or paletot takes the place of his brocade blouse, it is worn with a refinement and grace that might bring a jealous pang to the exquisite of our more refined civilization. Pantaloons fall easily and naturally over legs that have known unlimited freedom and bagginess, and even garrote collars meet correctly around sun-tanned throats. The new expression seldom overflows in gaudy cravats. I will back my Americanized Chinaman against any neophyte of European birth in the choice of that article. While in our own State, the Greaser resists one by one the garments of the Northern invader, and even wears the livery of his conqueror with a wild and buttonless freedom, the Chinaman, abused and degraded as he is, changes by correctly graded transition to the garments of Christian civilization. There is but one article of

European wear that he avoids. These Bohemian eyes have never yet been pained by the spectacle of a tall hat on the head of an intelligent Chinaman.

My acquaintance with John has been made up of weekly interviews, involving the adjustment of the washing accounts, so that I have not been able to study his character from a social view-point or observe him in the privacy of the domestic circle. I have gathered enough to justify me in believing him to be generally honest, faithful, simple, and painstaking. Of his simplicity let me record an instance where a sad and civil young Chinaman brought me certain shirts with most of the buttons missing and others hanging on delusively by a single thread. In a moment of unguarded irony I informed him that unity would at least have been preserved if the buttons were removed altogether. He smiled sadly and went away. I thought I had hurt his feelings, until the next week when he brought me my shirts with a look of intelligence, and the buttons carefully and totally erased. At another time, to guard against his general disposition to carry off anything as soiled clothes that he thought could hold water, I requested him to always wait until he saw me. Coming home late one evening, I found the household in great consternation, over an immovable Celestial who had remained seated on the front

door-step during the day, sad and submissive, firm but also patient, and only betraying any animation or token of his mission when he saw me coming. This same Chinaman evinced some evidences of regard for a little girl in the family, who in her turn reposed such faith in his intellectual qualities as to present him with a preternaturally uninteresting Sunday-school book, her own property. This book John made a point of carrying ostentatiously with him in his weekly visits. It appeared usually on the top of the clean clothes, and was sometimes painfully clasped outside of the big bundle of soiled linen. Whether John believed he unconsciously imbibed some spiritual life through its pasteboard cover, as the Prince in the Arabian Nights imbibed the medicine through the handle of the mallet, or whether he wished to exhibit a due sense of gratitude, or whether he had n't any pockets, I have never been able to ascertain. In his turn he would sometimes cut marvellous imitation roses from carrots for his little friend. I am inclined to think that the few roses strewn in John's path were such scentless imitations. The thorns only were real. From the persecutions of the young and old of a certain class, his life was a torment. I don't know what was the exact philosophy that Confucius taught, but it is to be hoped that poor John in his persecution is still able to detect the conscious hate

and fear with which inferiority always regards the possibility of even-handed justice, and which is the key-note to the vulgar clamor about servile and degraded races.

FROM A BACK WINDOW.

I REMEMBER that long ago, as a sanguine and trustful child, I became possessed of a highly colored lithograph, representing a fair Circassian sitting by a window. The price I paid for this work of art may have been extravagant, even in youth's fluctuating slate-pencil currency; but the secret joy I felt in its possession knew no pecuniary equivalent. It was not alone that Nature in Circassia lavished alike upon the cheek of beauty and the vegetable kingdom that most expensive of colors, — Lake; nor was it that the rose which bloomed beside the fair Circassian's window had no visible stem, and was directly grafted upon a marble balcony; but it was because it embodied an idea. That idea was a hinting of my Fate. I felt that somewhere a young and fair Circassian was sitting by a window looking out for me. The idea of resisting such an array of charms and color never occurred to me, and to my honor be it recorded, that during the feverish period of adolescence I never thought of averting my destiny. But as vacation and holiday came and went, and as my picture at first grew blurred, and then faded

quite away between the Eastern and Western continents in my atlas, so its charm seemed mysteriously to pass away. When I became convinced that few females, of Circassian or other origin, sat pensively resting their chins on their henna-tinged nails, at their parlor windows, I turned my attention to back windows. Although the fair Circassian has not yet burst upon me with open shutters, some peculiarities not unworthy of note have fallen under my observation. This knowledge has not been gained without sacrifice. I have made myself familiar with back windows and their prospects, in the weak disguise of seeking lodgings, heedless of the suspicious glances of landladies and their evident reluctance to show them. I have caught cold by long exposure to draughts. I have become estranged from friends by unconsciously walking to their back windows during a visit, when the weekly linen hung upon the line, or where Miss Fanny (ostensibly indisposed) actually assisted in the laundry, and Master Bobby, in scant attire, disported himself on the area railings. But I have thought of Galileo, and the invariable experience of all seekers and discoverers of truth has sustained me.

Show me the back windows of a man's dwelling, and I will tell you his character. The rear of a house only is sincere. The attitude of deception kept up at the front windows leaves the back area

defenceless. The world enters at the front door, but nature comes out at the back passage. That glossy, well-brushed individual, who lets himself in with a latch-key at the front door at night, is a very different being from the slipshod wretch who growls of mornings for hot water at the door of the kitchen. The same with Madame, whose contour of figure grows angular, whose face grows pallid, whose hair comes down, and who looks some ten years older through the sincere medium of a back window. No wonder that intimate friends fail to recognize each other in this *dos à dos* position. You may imagine yourself familiar with the silver door-plate and bow-windows of the mansion where dwells your Saccharissa; you may even fancy you recognize her graceful figure between the lace curtains of the upper chamber which you fondly imagine to be hers; but you shall dwell for months in the rear of her dwelling and within whispering distance of her bower, and never know it. You shall see her with a handkerchief tied round her head in confidential discussion with the butcher, and know her not. You shall hear her voice in shrill expostulation with her younger brother, and it shall awaken no familiar response.

I am writing at a back window. As I prefer the warmth of my coal-fire to the foggy freshness of the afternoon breeze that rattles the leafless shrubs in the garden below me, I have my window-

sash closed; consequently, I miss much of the shrilly altercation that has been going on in the kitchen of No. 7 just opposite. I have heard fragments of an entertaining style of dialogue usually known as "chaffing," which has just taken place between Biddy in No. 9 and the butcher who brings the dinner. I have been pitying the chilled aspect of a poor canary, put out to taste the fresh air, from the window of No. 5. I have been watching — and envying, I fear — the real enjoyment of two children raking over an old dust-heap in the alley, containing the waste and *débris* of all the back yards in the neighborhood. What a wealth of soda-water bottles and old iron they have acquired! But I am waiting for an even more familiar prospect from my back window. I know that later in the afternoon, when the evening paper comes, a thickset, gray-haired man will appear in his shirt-sleeves at the back door of No. 9, and, seating himself on the door-step, begin to read. He lives in a pretentious house, and I hear he is a rich man. But there is such humility in his attitude, and such evidence of gratitude at being allowed to sit outside of his own house and read his paper in his shirt-sleeves, that I can picture his domestic history pretty clearly. Perhaps he is following some old habit of humbler days. Perhaps he has entered into an agreement with his wife not to indulge his disgraceful habit in-doors. He does

not look like a man who could be coaxed into a dressing-gown. In front of his own palatial residence, I know him to be a quiet and respectable middle-aged business-man, but it is from my back window that my heart warms toward him in his shirt-sleeved simplicity. So I sit and watch him in the twilight as he reads gravely, and wonder sometimes, when he looks up, squares his chest, and folds his paper thoughtfully over his knee, whether he does n't fancy he hears the letting down of bars, or the tinkling of bells, as the cows come home and stand lowing for him at the gate.

BOONDER.

I NEVER knew how the subject of this memoir came to attach himself so closely to the affections of my family. He was not a prepossessing dog. He was not a dog of even average birth and breeding. His pedigree was involved in the deepest obscurity. He may have had brothers and sisters, but in the whole range of my canine acquaintance (a pretty extensive one), I never detected any of Boonder's peculiarities in any other of his species. His body was long, and his forelegs and hind-legs were very wide apart, as though Nature originally intended to put an extra pair between them, but had unwisely allowed herself to be persuaded out of it. This peculiarity was annoying on cold nights, as it always prolonged the interval of keeping the door open for Boonder's ingress long enough to allow two or three dogs of a reasonable length to enter. Boonder's feet were decided; his toes turned out considerably, and in repose his favorite attitude was the first position of dancing. Add to a pair of bright eyes ears that seemed to belong to some other dog, and a symmetrically pointed nose that fitted all apertures like a pass-key, and you have Boonder as we knew him.

I am inclined to think that his popularity was mainly owing to his quiet impudence. His advent in the family was that of an old member, who had been absent for a short time, but had returned to familiar haunts and associations. In a Pythagorean point of view this might have been the case, but I cannot recall any deceased member of the family who was in life partial to bone-burying (though it might be *post mortem* a consistent amusement), and this was Boonder's great weakness. He was at first discovered coiled up on a rug in an upper chamber, and was the least disconcerted of the entire household. From that moment Boonder became one of its recognized members, and privileges, often denied the most intelligent and valuable of his species, were quietly taken by him and submitted to by us. Thus, if he were found coiled up in a clothes-basket, or any article of clothing assumed locomotion on its own account, we only said, "O, it 's Boonder," with a feeling of relief that it was nothing worse.

I have spoken of his fondness for bone-burying. It could not be called an economical faculty, for he invariably forgot the locality of his treasure, and covered the garden with purposeless holes; but although the violets and daisies were not improved by Boonder's gardening, no one ever thought of punishing him. He became a synonyme for Fate; a Boonder to be grumbled at, to be accepted phil-

osophically, — but never to be averted. But although he was not an intelligent dog, nor an ornamental dog, he possessed some gentlemanly instincts. When he performed his only feat, — begging upon his hind legs (and looking remarkably like a penguin), — ignorant strangers would offer him crackers or cake, which he did n't like, as a reward of merit. Boonder always made a great show of accepting the proffered dainties, and even made hypocritical contortions as if swallowing, but always deposited the morsel when he was unobserved in the first convenient receptacle, — usually the visitor's overshoes.

In matters that did not involve courtesy, Boonder was sincere in his likes and dislikes. He was instinctively opposed to the railroad. When the track was laid through our street, Boonder maintained a defiant attitude toward every rail as it went down, and resisted the cars shortly after to the fullest extent of his lungs. I have a vivid recollection of seeing him, on the day of the trial trip, come down the street in front of the car, barking himself out of all shape, and thrown back several feet by the recoil of each bark. But Boonder was not the only one who has resisted innovations, or has lived to see the innovation prosper and even crush — But I am anticipating. Boonder had previously resisted the gas, but although he spent one whole day in angry altercation with the workmen, — leaving

his bones unburied and bleaching in the sun,— somehow the gas went in. The Spring Valley water was likewise unsuccessfully opposed, and the grading of an adjoining lot was for a long time a personal matter between Boonder and the contractor.

These peculiarities seemed to evince some decided character and embody some idea. A prolonged debate in the family upon this topic resulted in an addition to his name, — we called him "Boonder the Conservative," with a faint acknowledgment of his fateful power. But, although Boonder had his own way, his path was not entirely of roses. Thorns sometimes pricked his sensibilities. When certain minor chords were struck on the piano, Boonder was always painfully affected and howled a remonstrance. If he were removed for company's sake to the back yard, at the recurrence of the provocation, he would go his whole length (which was something) to improvise a howl that should reach the performer. But we got accustomed to Boonder, and as we were fond of music the playing went on.

One morning Boonder left the house in good spirits with his regular bone in his mouth, and apparently the usual intention of burying it. The next day he was picked up lifeless on the track,— run over apparently by the first car that went out of the depot.

SUSY

A STORY OF THE PLAINS

SUSY.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE the San Leandro turnpike stretches its dusty, hot, and interminable length along the valley, at a point where the heat and dust have become intolerable, the monotonous expanse of wild oats on either side illimitable, and the distant horizon apparently remoter than ever, it suddenly slips between a stunted thicket or hedge of "scrub oaks," which until that moment had been undistinguishable above the long, misty, quivering level of the grain. The thicket rising gradually in height, but with a regular slope whose gradient had been determined by centuries of western trade winds, presently becomes a fair wood of live-oak, and a few hundred yards further at last assumes the aspect of a primeval forest. A delicious coolness fills the air; the long, shadowy aisles greet the aching eye with a

soothing twilight; the murmur of unseen brooks is heard, and, by a strange irony, the enormous, widely-spaced stacks of wild oats are replaced by a carpet of tiny-leaved mosses and chickweed at the roots of trees, and the minutest clover in more open spaces. The baked and cracked adobe soil of the now vanished plains is exchanged for a heavy red mineral dust and gravel, rocks and boulders make their appearance, and at times the road is crossed by the white veins of quartz. It is still the San Leandro turnpike, — a few miles later to rise from this *cañada* into the upper plains again, — but it is also the actual gateway and avenue to the Robles Rancho. When the departing visitors of Judge Peyton, now owner of the rancho, reach the outer plains again, after twenty minutes' drive from the house, the *cañada*, rancho, and avenue have as completely disappeared from view as if they had been swallowed up in the plain.

A cross road from the turnpike is the usual approach to the *casa* or mansion, — a long, low quadrangle of brown adobe wall in a bare but gently sloping eminence. And here a second surprise meets the stranger. He seems to have emerged from the forest

upon another illimitable plain, but one utterly trackless, wild, and desolate. It is, however, only a lower terrace of the same valley, and, in fact, comprises the three square leagues of the Robles Rancho. Uncultivated and savage as it appears, given over to wild cattle and horses that sometimes sweep in frightened bands around the very *casa* itself, the long south wall of the corral embraces an orchard of gnarled pear-trees, an old vineyard, and a venerable garden of olives and oranges. A manor, formerly granted by Charles V. to Don Vincente Robles, of Andalusia, of pious and ascetic memory, it had commended itself to Judge Peyton, of Kentucky, a modern heretic pioneer of bookish tastes and secluded habits, who had bought it of Don Vincente's descendants. Here Judge Peyton seemed to have realized his idea of a perfect climate, and a retirement, half-studious, half-active, with something of the seigniorality of the old slaveholder that he had been. Here, too, he had seen the hope of restoring his wife's health — for which he had undertaken the overland emigration — more than fulfilled in Mrs. Peyton's improved physical condition, albeit at the expense,

perhaps, of some of the languorous graces of ailing American wifehood.

It was with a curious recognition of this latter fact that Judge Peyton watched his wife crossing the *patio* or courtyard with her arm around the neck of her adopted daughter "Suzette." A sudden memory crossed his mind of the first day that he had seen them together, — the day that he had brought the child and her boy-companion — two estrays from an emigrant train on the plains — to his wife in camp. Certainly Mrs. Peyton was stouter and stronger fibred; the wonderful Californian climate had materialized her figure, as it had their Eastern fruits and flowers, but it was stranger that "Susy" — the child of homelier frontier blood and parentage, whose wholesome peasant plumpness had at first attracted them — should have grown thinner and more graceful, and even seemed to have gained the delicacy his wife had lost. Six years had imperceptibly wrought this change; it had never struck him before so forcibly as on this day of Susy's return from the convent school at Santa Clara for the holidays.

The woman and child had reached the

broad veranda which, on one side of the *patio*, replaced the old Spanish corridor. It was the single modern innovation that Peyton had allowed himself when he had broken the quadrangular symmetry of the old house with a wooden "annexe" or addition beyond the walls. It made a pleasant lounging-place, shadowed from the hot midday sun by sloping roofs and awnings, and sheltered from the boisterous afternoon trade winds by the opposite side of the court. But Susy did not seem inclined to linger there long that morning, in spite of Mrs. Peyton's evident desire for a maternal tête-à-tête. The nervous preoccupation and capricious ennui of an indulged child showed in her pretty but discontented face, and knit her curved eyebrows, and Peyton saw a look of pain pass over his wife's face as the young girl suddenly and half-laughingly broke away and fluttered off towards the old garden.

Mrs. Peyton looked up and caught her husband's eye.

"I am afraid Susy finds it more dull here every time she returns," she said, with an apologetic smile. "I am glad she has invited one of her school friends to come for

a visit to-morrow. You know, yourself, John," she added, with a slight partisan attitude, "that the lonely old house and wild plain are not particularly lively for young people, however much they may suit *your* ways."

"It certainly must be dull if she can't stand it for three weeks in the year," said her husband dryly. "But we really cannot open the San Francisco house for her summer vacation, nor can we move from the rancho to a more fashionable locality. Besides, it will do her good to run wild here. I can remember when she was n't so fastidious. In fact, I was thinking just now how changed she was from the day when we picked her up" —

"How often am I to remind you, John," interrupted the lady, with some impatience, "that we agreed never to speak of her past, or even to think of her as anything but our own child. You know how it pains me! And the poor dear herself has forgotten it, and thinks of us only as her own parents. I really believe that if that wretched father and mother of hers had not been killed by the Indians, or were to come to life again, she would neither know them nor care for

them. I mean, of course, John," she said, averting her eyes from a slightly cynical smile on her husband's face, "that it 's only natural for young children to be forgetful, and ready to take new impressions."

"And as long, dear, as *we* are not the subjects of this youthful forgetfulness, and she is n't really finding *us* as stupid as the rancho," replied her husband cheerfully, "I suppose we must n't complain."

"John, how can you talk such nonsense?" said Mrs. Peyton impatiently. "But I have no fear of that," she added, with a slightly ostentatious confidence. "I only wish I was as sure" —

"Of what?"

"Of nothing happening that could take her from us. I do not mean death, John, — like our first little one. That does not happen to one twice; but I sometimes dread" —

"What? She 's only fifteen, and it 's rather early to think about the only other inevitable separation, — marriage. Come, Ally, this is mere fancy. She has been given up to us by her family, — at least, by all that we know are left of them. I have legally adopted her. If I have not made

her my heiress, it is because I prefer to leave everything to *you*, and I would rather she should know that she was dependent upon you for the future than upon me."

"And I can make a will in her favor if I want to?" said Mrs. Peyton quickly.

"Always," responded her husband smilingly; "but you have ample time to think of that, I trust. Meanwhile I have some news for you which may make Susy's visit to the rancho this time less dull to her. You remember Clarence Brant, the boy who was with her when we picked her up, and who really saved her life?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Peyton pettishly, "nor do I want to! You know, John, how distasteful and unpleasant it is for me to have those dreary, petty, and vulgar details of the poor child's past life recalled, and, thank Heaven, I have forgotten them except when you choose to drag them before me. You agreed, long ago, that we were never to talk of the Indian massacre of her parents, so that we could also ignore it before her; then why do you talk of her vulgar friends, who are just as unpleasant? Please let us drop the past."

"Willingly, my dear; but, unfortunately,

we cannot make others do it. And this is a case in point. It appears that this boy, whom we brought to Sacramento to deliver to a relative" —

"And who was a wicked little impostor, — you remember that yourself, John, for he said that he was the son of Colonel Brant, and that he was dead; and you know, and my brother Harry knew, that Colonel Brant was alive all the time, and that he was lying, and Colonel Brant was not his father," broke in Mrs. Peyton impatiently.

"As it seems you do remember that much," said Peyton dryly, "it is only just to him that I should tell you that it appears that he was not an impostor. His story was *true*. I have just learned that Colonel Brant *was* actually his father, but had concealed his lawless life here, as well as his identity, from the boy. He was really that vague relative to whom Clarence was confided, and under that disguise he afterwards protected the boy, had him carefully educated at the Jesuit College of San José, and, dying two years ago in that filibuster raid in Mexico, left him a considerable fortune."

"And what has he to do with Susy's holidays?" said Mrs. Peyton, with uneasy quickness. "John, you surely cannot expect her ever to meet this common creature again, with his vulgar ways. His wretched associates like that Jim Hooker, and, as you yourself admit, the blood of an assassin, duelist, and — Heaven knows what kind of a pirate his father was n't at the last — in his veins! You don't believe that a lad of this type, however much of his father's ill-gotten money he may have, can be fit company for your daughter? You never could have thought of inviting him here?"

"I 'm afraid that 's exactly what I have done, Ally," said the smiling but unmoved Peyton; "but I 'm still more afraid that your conception of his present condition is an unfair one, like your remembrance of his past. Father Sobriente, whom I met at San José yesterday, says he is very intelligent, and thoroughly educated, with charming manners and refined tastes. His father's money, which they say was an investment for him in Carson's Bank five years ago, is as good as any one's, and his father's blood won't hurt him in California or the Southwest. At least, he is received

everywhere, and Don Juan Robinson was his guardian. Indeed, as far as social status goes, it might be a serious question if the actual daughter of the late John Silsbee, of Pike County, and the adopted child of John Peyton was in the least his superior. As Father Sobriente evidently knew Clarence's former companionship with Susy and her parents, it would be hardly politic for us to ignore it or seem to be ashamed of it. So I intrusted Sobriente with an invitation to young Brant on the spot."

Mrs. Peyton's impatience, indignation, and opposition, which had successively given way before her husband's quiet, masterful good humor, here took the form of a neurotic fatalism. She shook her head with superstitious resignation.

"Did n't I tell you, John, that I always had a dread of something coming"—

"But if it comes in the shape of a shy young lad, I see nothing singularly portentous in it. They have not met since they were quite small; their tastes have changed; if they don't quarrel and fight they may be equally bored with each other. Yet until then, in one way or another, Clarence will occupy the young lady's vacant caprice, and

her school friend, Mary Rogers, will be here, you know, to divide his attentions, and," added Peyton, with mock solemnity, "preserve the interest of strict propriety. Shall I break it to her, — or will you?"

"No, — yes," hesitated Mrs. Peyton; "perhaps I had better."

"Very well, I leave his character in your hands; only don't prejudice her into a romantic fancy for him." And Judge Peyton lounged smilingly away.

Then two little tears forced themselves from Mrs. Peyton's eyes. Again she saw that prospect of uninterrupted companionship with Susy, upon which each successive year she had built so many maternal hopes and confidences, fade away before her. She dreaded the coming of Susy's school friend, who shared her daughter's present thoughts and intimacy, although she had herself invited her in a more desperate dread of the child's abstracted, discontented eyes; she dreaded the advent of the boy who had shared Susy's early life before she knew her; she dreaded the ordeal of breaking the news and perhaps seeing that pretty animation spring into her eyes, which she had begun to believe no solicitude or tenderness of

her own ever again awakened, — and yet she dreaded still more that her husband should see it too. For the love of this re-created woman, although not entirely materialized with her changed fibre, had nevertheless become a coarser selfishness fostered by her loneliness and limited experience. The maternal yearning left unsatisfied by the loss of her first-born had never been filled by Susy's thoughtless acceptance of it; she had been led astray by the child's easy transference of dependence and the forgetfulness of youth, and was only now dimly conscious of finding herself face to face with an alien nature.

She started to her feet and followed the direction that Susy had taken. For a moment she had to front the afternoon trade wind which chilled her as it swept the plain beyond the gateway, but was stopped by the adobe wall, above whose shelter the stunted treetops — through years of exposure — slanted as if trimmed by gigantic shears. At first, looking down the venerable alley of fantastic, knotted shapes, she saw no trace of Susy. But half way down the gleam of a white skirt against a thicket of dark olives showed her the young girl sitting on a bench

in a neglected arbor. In the midst of this formal and faded pageantry she looked charmingly fresh, youthful, and pretty; and yet the unfortunate woman thought that her attitude and expression at that moment suggested more than her fifteen years of girlhood. Her golden hair still hung unfettered over her straight, boy-like back and shoulders; her short skirt still showed her childish feet and ankles; yet there seemed to be some undefined maturity or a vague womanliness about her that stung Mrs. Peyton's heart. The child was growing away from her, too!

"Susy!"

The young girl raised her head quickly; her deep violet eyes seemed also to leap with a sudden suspicion, and with a half-mechanical, secretive movement, that might have been only a schoolgirl's instinct, her right hand had slipped a paper on which she was scribbling between the leaves of her book. Yet the next moment, even while looking interrogatively at her mother, she withdrew the paper quietly, tore it up into small pieces, and threw them on the ground.

But Mrs. Peyton was too preoccupied

with her news to notice the circumstance, and too nervous in her haste to be tactful. "Susy, your father has invited that boy, Clarence Brant, — you know that creature we picked up and assisted on the plains, when you were a mere baby, — to come down here and make us a visit."

Her heart seemed to stop beating as she gazed breathlessly at the girl. But Susy's face, unchanged except for the alert, questioning eyes, remained fixed for a moment; then a childish smile of wonder opened her small red mouth, expanded it slightly as she said simply: —

"Lor, mar! He has n't, really!"

Inexpressibly, yet unreasonably reassured, Mrs. Peyton hurriedly recounted her husband's story of Clarence's fortune, and was even joyfully surprised into some fairness of statement.

"But you don't remember him much, do you, dear? It was so long ago, and — you are quite a young lady now," she added eagerly.

The open mouth was still fixed; the wondering smile would have been idiotic in any face less dimpled, rosy, and piquant than Susy's. After a slight gasp, as if in still

incredulous and partly reminiscent preoccupation, she said without replying: —

"How funny! When is he coming?"

"Day after to-morrow," returned Mrs. Peyton, with a contented smile.

"And Mary Rogers will be here, too. It will be real fun for her."

Mrs. Peyton was more than reassured. Half ashamed of her jealous fears, she drew Susy's golden head towards her and kissed it. And the young girl, still reminiscent, with smilingly abstracted toleration, returned the caress.

CHAPTER II.

It was not thought inconsistent with Susy's capriciousness that she should declare her intention the next morning of driving her pony buggy to Santa Inez to anticipate the stage-coach and fetch Mary Rogers from the station. Mrs. Peyton, as usual, supported the young lady's whim and opposed her husband's objections.

"Because the stage-coach happens to pass our gate, John, it is no reason why Susy should n't drive her friend from Santa Inez if she prefers it. It 's only seven miles, and you can send Pedro to follow her on horseback to see that she comes to no harm."

"But that is n't Pedro's business," said Peyton.

"He ought to be proud of the privilege," returned the lady, with a toss of her head.

Peyton smiled grimly, but yielded; and when the stage-coach drew up the next afternoon at the Santa Inez Hotel, Susy was already waiting in her pony carriage before

it. Although the susceptible driver, expressman, and passengers generally, charmed with this golden-haired vision, would have gladly protracted the meeting of the two young friends, the transfer of Mary Rogers from the coach to the carriage was effected with considerable hauteur and youtbful dignity by Susy. Even Mary Rogers, two years Susy's senior, a serious brunette, whose good-humor did not, however, impair her capacity for sentiment, was impressed and even embarrassed by her demeanor; but only for a moment. When they had driven from the hotel and were fairly hidden again in the dust of the outlying plain, with the discreet Pedro hovering in the distance, Susy dropped the reins, and, grasping her companion's arm, gasped, in tones of dramatic intensity: —

"He 's been heard from, and is coming *here!*"

"Who?"

A sickening sense that her old confidante had already lost touch with her — they had been separated for nearly two weeks — might have passed through Susy's mind.

"Who?" she repeated, with a vicious shake of Mary's arm, "why, Clarence Brant, of course."

"No!" said Mary, vaguely.

Nevertheless, Susy went on rapidly, as if to neutralize the effect of her comrade's vacuity.

"You never could have imagined it! Never! Even *I*, when mother told me, I thought I should have fainted, and *all* would have been revealed!"

"But," hesitated the still wondering confidante, "I thought that was all over long ago. You have n't seen him nor heard from him since that day you met accidentally at Santa Clara, two years ago, have you?"

Susy's eyes shot a blue ray of dark but unutterable significance into Mary's, and then were carefully averted. Mary Rogers, although perfectly satisfied that Susy had never seen Clarence since, nevertheless instantly accepted and was even thrilled with this artful suggestion of a clandestine correspondence. Such was the simple faith of youthful friendship.

"Mother knows nothing of it, of course, and a word from you or him would ruin everything," continued the breathless Susy. "That 's why I came to fetch you and warn you. You must see him first, and warn him at any cost. If I had n't run every

risk to come here to-day, Heaven knows what might have happened! What do you think of the ponies, dear? They 're my own, and the sweetest! This one 's Susy, that one Clarence, — but privately, you know. Before the world and in the stables he 's only Birdie."

"But I thought you wrote to me that you called them 'Paul and Virginie,'" said Mary doubtfully.

"I do, sometimes," said Susy calmly. "But one has to learn to suppress one's feelings, dear!" Then quickly, "I do so hate deceit, don't you? Tell me, don't you think deceit perfectly hateful?"

Without waiting for her friend's loyal assent, she continued rapidly: "And he 's just rolling in wealth! and educated, papa says, to the highest degree!"

"Then," began Mary, "if he 's coming with your mother's consent, and if you have n't quarreled, and it is not broken off, I should think you 'd be just delighted."

But another quick flash from Susy's eyes dispersed these beatific visions of the future. "Hush!" she said, with suppressed dramatic intensity. "You know not what you say! There 's an awful mystery hangs over him.

Mary Rogers," continued the young girl, approaching her small mouth to her confidante's ear in an appalling whisper. "His father was — a *pirate!* Yes — lived a pirate and was killed a pirate!"

The statement, however, seemed to be partly ineffective. Mary Rogers was startled but not alarmed, and even protested feebly. "But," she said, "if the father 's dead, what 's that to do with Clarence? He was always with your papa — so you told me, dear — or other people, and could n't catch anything from his own father. And I 'm sure, dearest, he always seemed nice and quiet."

"Yes, *seemed*," returned Susy darkly, "but that 's all you know! It was in *his blood*. You know it always is, — you read it in the books, — you could see it in his eye. There were times, my dear, when he was thwarted, — when the slightest attention from another person to me revealed it! I have kept it to myself, — but think, dearest, of the effects of jealousy on that passionate nature! Sometimes I tremble to look back upon it."

Nevertheless, she raised her hands and threw back her lovely golden mane from her

childish shoulders with an easy, untroubled gesture. It was singular that Mary Rogers, leaning back comfortably in the buggy, also accepted these heart-rending revelations with comfortably knitted brows and luxuriously contented concern. If she found it difficult to recognize in the picture just drawn by Susy the quiet, gentle, and sadly reserved youth she had known, she said nothing. After a silence, lazily watching the distant wheeling vacquero, she said: —

"And your father always sends an outrider like that with you? How nice! So picturesque — and like the old Spanish days."

"Hush!" said Susy, with another unutterable glance.

But this time Mary was in full sympathetic communion with her friend, and equal to any incoherent hiatus of revelation.

"No!" she said promptly, "you don't mean it!"

"Don't ask me. I dare n't say anything to papa, for he 'd be simply furious. But there are times when we 're alone, and Pedro wheels down so near with *such* a look in his black eyes, that I 'm all in a tremble. It 's dreadful! They say he 's a real Bri-

ones, — and he sometimes says something in Spanish, ending with 'señorita,' but I pretend I don't understand."

"And I suppose that if anything should happen to the ponies, he 'd just risk his life to save you."

"Yes, — and it would be so awful, — for I just hate him!"

"But if *I* was with you, dear, he could n't expect you to be as grateful as if you were alone. Susy!" she continued after a pause, "if you just stirred up the ponies a little so as to make 'em go fast, perhaps he might think they 'd got away from you, and come dashing down here. It would be so funny to see him, — would n't it?"

The two girls looked at each other; their eyes sparkled already with a fearful joy, — they drew a long breath of guilty anticipation. For a moment Susy even believed in her imaginary sketch of Pedro's devotion.

"Papa said I was n't to use the whip except in a case of necessity," she said, reaching for the slender silver-handled toy, and setting her pretty lips together with the added determination of disobedience. "G'long!" — and she laid the lash smartly on the shining backs of the animals.

They were wiry, slender brutes of Mojave Indian blood, only lately broken to harness, and still undisciplined in temper. The lash sent them rearing into the air, where, forgetting themselves in the slackened traces and loose reins, they came down with a succession of bounds that brought the light buggy leaping after them with its wheels scarcely touching the ground. That unlucky lash had knocked away the bonds of a few months' servitude and sent the half-broken brutes instinctively careering with arched backs and kicking heels into the field towards the nearest cover.

Mary Rogers cast a hurried glance over her shoulder. Alas, they had not calculated on the insidious levels of the terraced plain, and the faithful Pedro had suddenly disappeared; the intervention of six inches of rising wild oats had wiped him out of the prospect and their possible salvation as completely as if he had been miles away. Nevertheless, the girls were not frightened; perhaps they had not time. There was, however, the briefest interval for the most dominant of feminine emotions, and it was taken advantage of by Susy.

"It was all *your* fault, dear!" she gasped,

as the forewheels of the buggy, dropping into a gopher rut, suddenly tilted up the back of the vehicle and shot its fair occupants into the yielding palisades of dusty grain. The shock detached the whiffletree from the splinter-bar, snapped the light pole, and, turning the now thoroughly frightened animals again from their course, sent them, goaded by the clattering fragments, flying down the turnpike. Half a mile farther on they overtook the gleaming white canvas hood of a slowly moving wagon drawn by two oxen, and, swerving again, the nearer pony stepped upon a trailing trace and ingloriously ended their career by rolling himself and his companion in the dust at the very feet of the peacefully plodding team.

Equally harmless and inglorious was the catastrophe of Susy and her friend. The strong, elastic stalks of the tall grain broke their fall and enabled them to scramble to their feet, dusty, disheveled, but unhurt, and even unstunned by the shock. Their first instinctive cries over a damaged hat or ripped skirt were followed by the quick reaction of childish laughter. They were alone; the very defection of Pedro consoled

them, in its absence of any witness to their disaster; even their previous slight attitude to each other was forgotten. They groped their way, pushing and panting, to the road again, where, beholding the overset buggy with its wheels ludicrously in the air, they suddenly seized and shook each other, and in an outburst of hilarious ecstasy, fairly laughed until the tears came into their eyes.

Then there was a breathless silence.

"The stage will be coming by in a moment," composedly said Susy. "Fix me, dear."

Mary Rogers calmly walked around her friend, bestowing a practical shake there, a pluck here, completely retying one bow and restoring an engaging fullness to another, yet critically examining, with her head on one side, the fascinating result. Then Susy performed the same function for Mary with equal deliberation and deftness. Suddenly Mary started and looked up.

"It 's coming," she said quickly, "and they 've *seen us.*"

The expression of the faces of the two girls instantly changed. A pained dignity and resignation, apparently born of the most harrowing experiences and controlled

only by perfect good breeding, was distinctly suggested in their features and attitude as they stood patiently by the wreck of their overturned buggy awaiting the oncoming coach. In sharp contrast was the evident excitement among the passengers. A few rose from their seats in their eagerness; as the stage pulled up in the road beside the buggy four or five of the younger men leaped to the ground.

"Are you hurt, miss?" they gasped sympathetically.

Susy did not immediately reply, but ominously knitted her pretty eyebrows as if repressing a spasm of pain. Then she said, "Not at all," coldly, with the suggestion of stoically concealing some lasting or perhaps fatal injury, and took the arm of Mary Rogers, who had, in the mean time, established a touching yet graceful limp.

Declining the proffered assistance of the passengers, they helped each other into the coach, and freezingly requesting the driver to stop at Mr. Peyton's gate, maintained a statuesque and impressive silence. At the gates they got down, followed by the sympathetic glances of the others.

To all appearance their escapade, albeit

fraught with dangerous possibilities, had happily ended. But in the economy of human affairs, as in nature, forces are not suddenly let loose without more or less sympathetic disturbance which is apt to linger after the impelling cause is harmlessly spent. The fright which the girls had unsuccessfully attempted to produce in the heart of their escort had passed him to become a panic elsewhere. Judge Peyton, riding near the gateway of his rancho, was suddenly confronted by the spectacle of one of his vacqueros driving on before him the two lassoed and dusty ponies, with a face that broke into violent gesticulating at his master's quick interrogation.

"Ah! Mother of God! It was an evil day! For the bronchos had run away, upset the buggy, and had only been stopped by a brave *Americano* of an ox-team, whose lasso was even now around their necks, to prove it, and who had been dragged a matter of a hundred *varas*, like a calf, at their heels. The señoritas, — ah! had he not already said they were safe, by the mercy of Jesus! — picked up by the coach, and would be here at this moment."

"But where was Pedro all the time?

What was he doing?" demanded Peyton, with a darkened face and gathering anger.

The vacquero looked at his master, and shrugged his shoulders significantly. At any other time Peyton would have remembered that Pedro, as the reputed scion of a decayed Spanish family, and claiming superiority, was not a favorite with his fellow-retainers. But the gesture, half of suggestion, half of depreciation, irritated Peyton still more.

"Well, where is this American who *did* something when there was n't a man among you all able to stop a child's runaway ponies?" he said sarcastically. "Let me see him."

The vacquero became still more deprecatory.

"Ah! He had driven on with his team towards San Antonio. He would not stop to be thanked. But that was the whole truth. He, Incarnacion, could swear to it as to the Creed. There was nothing more."

"Take those beasts around the back way to the corral," said Peyton, thoroughly enraged, "and not a word of this to any one at the *casa*, do you hear? Not a word to Mrs. Peyton or the servants, or, by Heaven, I'll

clear the rancho of the whole lazy crew of you at once. Out of the way there, and be off!"

He spurred his horse past the frightened menial, and dashed down the narrow lane that led to the gate. But, as Incarnacion had truly said, "It was an evil day," for at the bottom of the lane, ambling slowly along as he lazily puffed a yellow cigarette, appeared the figure of the erring Pedro. Utterly unconscious of the accident, attributing the disappearance of his charges to the inequalities of the plain, and, in truth, little interested in what he firmly believed was his purely artificial function, he had even made a larger circuit to stop at a wayside *fonda* for refreshments.

Unfortunately, there is no more illogical sequence of human emotion than the exasperation produced by the bland manner of the unfortunate object who has excited it, although that very unconcern may be the convincing proof of innocence of intention. Judge Peyton, already influenced, was furious at the comfortable obliviousness of his careless henchman, and rode angrily towards him. Only a quick turn of Pedro's wrist kept the two men from coming into collision.

"Is this the way you attend to your duty?" demanded Peyton, in a thick, suppressed voice. "Where is the buggy? Where is my daughter?"

There was no mistaking Judge Peyton's manner, even if the reason of it was not so clear to Pedro's mind, and his hot Latin blood flew instinctively to his face. But for that, he might have shown some concern or asked an explanation. As it was, he at once retorted with the national shrug and the national half-scornful, half-lazy "*Quien sabe?*"

"Who knows?" repeated Peyton, hotly. "*I* do! She was thrown out of her buggy through your negligence and infernal laziness! The ponies ran away, and were stopped by a stranger who was n't afraid of risking his bones, while *you* were limping around somewhere like a slouching, cowardly coyote."

The vacquero struggled a moment between blank astonishment and inarticulate rage. At last he burst out: —

"I am no coyote! I was there! I saw no runaway!"

"Don't lie to me, sir!" roared Peyton. "I tell you the buggy was smashed, the girls

were thrown out and nearly killed" — He stopped suddenly. The sound of youthful laughter had come from the bottom of the lane, where Susy Peyton and Mary Rogers, just alighted from the coach, in the reaction of their previous constrained attitude, were flying hilariously into view. A slight embarrassment crossed Peyton's face; a still deeper flush of anger overspread Pedro's sullen cheek.

Then Pedro found tongue again, his native one, rapidly, violently, half incoherently. "Ah, yes! It had come to this. It seems he was not a vacquero, a companion of the padrone on lands that had been his own before the *Americanos* robbed him of it, but a servant, a lackey of *muchachas*, an attendant on children to amuse them, or — why not? — an appendage to his daughter's state! Ah, Jesus Maria! such a state! such a *muchacha!* A picked-up foundling — a swineherd's daughter — to be ennobled by his, Pedro's, attendance, and for whose vulgar, clownish tricks, — tricks of a swineherd's daughter, — he, Pedro, was to be brought to book and insulted as if she were of Hidalgo blood! Ah, Caramba! Don Juan Peyton would find he could no more

make a servant of him than he could make a lady of her!"

The two young girls were rapidly approaching. Judge Peyton spurred his horse beside the vacquero's, and, swinging the long thong of his bridle ominously in his clenched fingers, said, with a white face: —

"*Vamos!*"

Pedro's hand slid towards his sash. Peyton only looked at him with a rigid smile of scorn.

"Or I 'll lash you here before them both," he added in a lower voice.

The vacquero met Peyton's relentless eyes with a yellow flash of hate, drew his reins sharply, until his mustang, galled by the cruel bit, reared suddenly as if to strike at the immovable American, then, apparently with the same action, he swung it around on its hind legs, as on a pivot, and dashed towards the corral at a furious gallop.

CHAPTER III.

MEANTIME the heroic proprietor of the peaceful ox-team, whose valor Incarnacion had so infelicitously celebrated, was walking listlessly in the dust beside his wagon. At a first glance his slouching figure, taken in connection with his bucolic conveyance, did not immediately suggest a hero. As he emerged from the dusty cloud it could be seen that he was wearing a belt from which a large dragoon revolver and hunting knife were slung, and placed somewhat ostentatiously across the wagon seat was a rifle. Yet the other contents of the wagon were of a singularly inoffensive character, and even suggested articles of homely barter. Culinary utensils of all sizes, tubs, scullery brushes, and clocks, with several rolls of cheap carpeting and calico, might have been the wares of some traveling vender. Yet, as they were only visible through a flap of the drawn curtains of the canvas hood, they did not mitigate the general aggressive

effect of their owner's appearance. A red bandanna handkerchief knotted and thrown loosely over his shoulders, a slouched hat pulled darkly over a head of long tangled hair, which, however, shadowed a round, comfortable face, scantily and youthfully bearded, were part of these confusing inconsistencies.

The shadows of the team wagon were already lengthening grotesquely over the flat, cultivated fields, which for some time had taken the place of the plains of wild oats in the branch road into which they had turned. The gigantic shadow of the proprietor, occasionally projected before it, was in characteristic exaggeration, and was often obliterated by a puff of dust, stirred by the plodding hoofs of the peaceful oxen, and swept across the field by the strong afternoon trades. The sun sank lower, although a still potent presence above the horizon line; the creaking wagon lumbered still heavily along. Yet at intervals its belligerent proprietor would start up from his slouching, silent march, break out into violent, disproportionate, but utterly ineffective objurgation of his cattle, jump into the air and kick his heels together in some par-

oxysm of indignation against them, — an act, however, which was received always with heavy bovine indifference, the dogged scorn of swaying, repudiating heads, or the dull contempt of lazily flicking tails.

Towards sunset one or two straggling barns and cottages indicated their approach to the outskirts of a country town or settlement. Here the team halted, as if the belligerent-looking teamster had felt his appearance was inconsistent with an effeminate civilization, and the oxen were turned into an open waste opposite a nondescript wooden tenement, half farmhouse and half cabin, evidently of the rudest Western origin. He may have recognized the fact that these "shanties" were not, as the ordinary traveler might infer, the first rude shelter of the original pioneers or settlers, but the later makeshifts of some recent Western immigrants who, like himself, probably found themselves unequal to the settled habits of the village, and who still retained their nomadic instincts. It chanced, however, that the cabin at present was occupied by a New England mechanic and his family, who had emigrated by ship around Cape Horn, and who had no experience of the West,

the plains, or its people. It was therefore with some curiosity and a certain amount of fascinated awe that the mechanic's only daughter regarded from the open door of her dwelling the arrival of this wild and lawless-looking stranger.

Meantime he had opened the curtains of the wagon and taken from its interior a number of pots, pans, and culinary utensils, which he proceeded to hang upon certain hooks that were placed on the outer ribs of the board and the sides of the vehicle. To this he added a roll of rag carpet, the end of which hung from the tailboard, and a roll of pink calico temptingly displayed on the seat. The mystification and curiosity of the young girl grew more intense at these proceedings. It looked like the ordinary exhibition of a traveling peddler, but the gloomy and embattled appearance of the man himself scouted so peaceful and commonplace a suggestion. Under the pretense of chasing away a marauding hen, she sallied out upon the waste near the wagon. It then became evident that the traveler had seen her, and was not averse to her interest in his movements, although he had not changed his attitude of savage retrospection. An occasional

ejaculation of suppressed passion, as if the memory of some past conflict was too much for him, escaped him even in this peaceful occupation. As this possibly caused the young girl to still hover timidly in the distance, he suddenly entered the wagon and reappeared carrying a tin bucket, with which he somewhat ostentatiously crossed her path, his eyes darkly wandering as if seeking something.

"If you 're lookin' for the spring, it 's a spell furder on — by the willows."

It was a pleasant voice, the teamster thought, albeit with a dry, crisp, New England accent unfamiliar to his ears. He looked into the depths of an unlovely blue-check sunbonnet, and saw certain small, irregular features and a sallow cheek, lit up by a pair of perfectly innocent, trustful, and wondering brown eyes. Their timid possessor seemed to be a girl of seventeen, whose figure, although apparently clad in one of her mother's gowns, was still undeveloped and repressed by rustic hardship and innutrition. As her eyes met his she saw that the face of this gloomy stranger was still youthful, by no means implacable, and, even at that moment, was actually suf-

fused by a brick-colored blush! In matters of mere intuition, the sex, even in its most rustic phase, is still our superior; and this unsophisticated girl, as the trespasser stammered, "Thank ye, miss," was instinctively emboldened to greater freedom.

"Dad ain't tu hum, but ye kin have a drink o' milk if ye keer for it."

She motioned shyly towards the cabin, and then led the way. The stranger, with an inarticulate murmur, afterwards disguised as a cough, followed her meekly. Nevertheless, by the time they had reached the cabin he had shaken his long hair over his eyes again, and a dark abstraction gathered chiefly in his eyebrows. But it did not efface from the girl's mind the previous concession of a blush, and, although it added to her curiosity, did not alarm her. He drank the milk awkwardly. But by the laws of courtesy, even among the most savage tribes, she felt he was, at that moment at least, harmless. A timid smile fluttered around her mouth as she said: —

"When ye hung up them things I thought ye might be havin' suthing to swap or sell. That is," — with tactful politeness, — "mother was wantin' a new skillet, and it would

have been handy if you 'd had one. But" — with an apologetic glance at his equipments — "if it ain't your business, it 's all right, and no offense."

"I 've got a lot o' skillets," said the strange teamster, with marked condescension, "and she can have one. They 're all that 's left outer a heap o' trader's stuff captured by Injuns t' other side of Laramie. We had a big fight to get 'em back. Lost two of our best men, — scalped at Bloody Creek, — and had to drop a dozen redskins in their tracks, — me and another man, — lyin' flat in er wagon and firin' under the flaps o' the canvas. I don't know ez they waz wuth it," he added in gloomy retrospect; "but I 've got to get rid of 'em, I reckon, somehow, afore I work over to Deadman's Gulch again."

The young girl's eyes brightened timidly with a feminine mingling of imaginative awe and personal, pitying interest. He was, after all, so young and amiable looking for such hardships and adventures. And with all this, he — this Indian fighter — was a little afraid of *her!*

"Then that 's why you carry that knife and six-shooter?" she said. "But you

won't want 'em now, here in the settlement."

"That 's ez mebbe," said the stranger darkly. He paused, and then suddenly, as if recklessly accepting a dangerous risk, unbuckled his revolver and handed it abstractedly to the young girl. But the sheath of the bowie-knife was a fixture in his body-belt, and he was obliged to withdraw the glittering blade by itself, and to hand it to her in all its naked terrors. The young girl received the weapons with a smiling complacency. Upon such altars as these the skeptical reader will remember that Mars had once hung his "battered shield," his lance, and "uncontrolled crest."

Nevertheless, the warlike teamster was not without embarrassment. Muttering something about the necessity of "looking after his stock," he achieved a hesitating bow, backed awkwardly out of the door, and receiving from the conquering hands of the young girl his weapons again, was obliged to carry them somewhat ingloriously in his hands across the road, and put them on the wagon seat, where, in company with the culinary articles, they seemed to lose their distinctively aggressive character. Here,

although his cheek was still flushed from his peaceful encounter, his voice regained some of its hoarse severity as he drove the oxen from the muddy pool into which they had luxuriantly wandered, and brought their fodder from the wagon. Later, as the sun was setting, he lit a corn-cob pipe, and somewhat ostentatiously strolled down the road, with a furtive eye lingering upon the still open door of the farmhouse. Presently two angular figures appeared from it, the farmer and his wife, intent on barter.

These he received with his previous gloomy preoccupation, and a slight variation of the story he had told their daughter. It is possible that his suggestive indifference piqued and heightened the bargaining instincts of the woman, for she not only bought the skillet, but purchased a clock and a roll of carpeting. Still more, in some effusion of rustic courtesy, she extended an invitation to him to sup with them, which he declined and accepted in the same embarrassed breath, returning the proffered hospitality by confidentially showing them a couple of dried scalps, presumably of Indian origin. It was in the same moment of human weakness that he answered their po-

lite query as to "what they might call him," by intimating that his name was "Red Jim," — a title of achievement by which he was generally known, which for the present must suffice them. But during the repast that followed this was shortened to "Mister Jim," and even familiarly by the elders to plain "Jim." Only the young girl habitually used the formal prefix in return for the "Miss Phœbe" that he called her.

With three such sympathetic and unexperienced auditors the gloomy embarrassment of Red Jim was soon dissipated, although it could hardly be said that he was generally communicative. Dark tales of Indian warfare, of night attacks and wild stampedes, in which he had always taken a prominent part, flowed freely from his lips, but little else of his past history or present prospects. And even his narratives of adventure were more or less fragmentary and imperfect in detail.

"You woz saying," said the farmer, with slow, matter of fact, New England deliberation, "ez how you guessed you woz beguiled amongst the Injins by your Mexican partner, a pow'ful influential man, and yet you woz the only one escaped the gen'ral slar-

terin'. How came the Injins to kill *him*, — their friend?"

"They did n't," returned Jim, with ominously averted eyes.

"What became of him?" continued the farmer.

Red Jim shadowed his eyes with his hand, and cast a dark glance of scrutiny out of the doors and windows. The young girl perceived it with timid, fascinated concern, and said hurriedly: —

"Don't ask him, father! Don't you see he must n't tell?"

"Not when spies may be hangin' round, and doggin' me at every step," said Red Jim, as if reflecting, with another furtive glance towards the already fading prospect without. "They 've sworn to revenge him," he added moodily.

A momentary silence followed. The farmer coughed slightly, and looked dubiously at his wife. But the two women had already exchanged feminine glances of sympathy for this evident slayer of traitors, and were apparently inclined to stop any adverse criticism.

In the midst of which a shout was heard from the road. The farmer and his family

instinctively started. Red Jim alone remained unmoved, — a fact which did not lessen the admiration of his feminine audience. The host rose quickly, and went out. The figure of a horseman had halted in the road, but after a few moments' conversation with the farmer they both moved towards the house and disappeared. When the farmer returned, it was to say that "one of them 'Frisco dandies, who did n't keer about stoppin' at the hotel in the settlement," had halted to give his "critter" a feed and drink that he might continue his journey. He had asked him to come in while the horse was feeding, but the stranger had "guessed he 'd stretch his legs outside and smoke his cigar;" he might have thought the company "not fine enough for him," but he was "civil spoken enough, and had an all-fired smart hoss, and seemed to know how to run him." To the anxious inquiries of his wife and daughter he added that the stranger did n't seem like a spy or a Mexican; was "as young as *him*," pointing to the moody Red Jim, "and a darned sight more peaceful-like in style."

Perhaps owing to the criticism of the farmer, perhaps from some still lurking sus-

picion of being overheard by eavesdroppers, or possibly from a humane desire to relieve the strained apprehension of the women, Red Jim, as the farmer disappeared to rejoin the stranger, again dropped into a lighter and gentler vein of reminiscence. He told them how, when a mere boy, he had been lost from an emigrant train in company with a little girl some years his junior. How, when they found themselves alone on the desolate plain, with the vanished train beyond their reach, he endeavored to keep the child from a knowledge of the real danger of their position, and to soothe and comfort her. How he carried her on his back, until, exhausted, he sank in a heap of sage-brush. How he was surrounded by Indians, who, however, never suspected his hiding-place; and how he remained motionless and breathless with the sleeping child for three hours, until they departed. How, at the last moment, he had perceived a train in the distance, and had staggered with her thither, although shot at and wounded by the trainmen in the belief that he was an Indian. How it was afterwards discovered that the child was the long-lost daughter of a millionaire; how he had resolutely refused

any gratuity for saving her, and she was now a peerless young heiress, famous in California. Whether this lighter tone of narrative suited him better, or whether the active feminine sympathy of his auditors helped him along, certain it was that his story was more coherent and intelligible and his voice less hoarse and constrained than in his previous belligerent reminiscences; his expression changed, and even his features worked into something like gentler emotion. The bright eyes of Phœbe, fastened upon him, turned dim with a faint moisture, and her pale cheek took upon itself a little color. The mother, after interjecting "Du tell," and "I wanter know," remained open-mouthed, staring at her visitor. And in the silence that followed, a pleasant, but somewhat melancholy voice came from the open door.

"I beg your pardon, but I thought I could n't be mistaken. It *is* my old friend, Jim Hooker!"

Everybody started. Red Jim stumbled to his feet with an inarticulate and hysteric exclamation. Yet the apparition that now stood in the doorway was far from being terrifying or discomposing. It was evidently

the stranger, — a slender, elegantly-knit figure, whose upper lip was faintly shadowed by a soft, dark mustache indicating early manhood, and whose unstudied ease in his well-fitting garments bespoke the dweller of cities. Good-looking and well-dressed, without the consciousness of being either; self-possessed through easy circumstances, yet without self-assertion; courteous by nature and instinct as well as from an experience of granting favors, he might have been a welcome addition to even a more critical company. But Red Jim, hurriedly seizing his outstretched hand, instantly dragged him away from the doorway into the road and out of hearing of his audience.

"Did you hear what I was saying?" he asked hoarsely.

"Well, yes, — I think so," returned the stranger, with a quiet smile.

"Ye ain't goin' back on me, Clarence, are ye, — ain't goin' to gimme away afore them, old pard, are ye?" said Jim, with a sudden change to almost pathetic pleading.

"No," returned the stranger, smiling. "And certainly not before that interested young lady, Jim. But stop. Let me look at you."

He held out both hands, took Jim's, spread them apart for a moment with a boyish gesture, and, looking in his face, said half mischievously, half sadly, "Yes, it's the same old Jim Hooker, — unchanged."

"But *you 're* changed, — reg'lar war paint, Big Injin style!" said Hooker, looking up at him with an awkward mingling of admiration and envy. "Heard you struck it rich with the old man, and was Mister Brant now!"

"Yes," said Clarence gently, yet with a smile that had not only a tinge of weariness but even of sadness in it.

Unfortunately, the act, which was quite natural to Clarence's sensitiveness, and indeed partly sprang from some concern in his old companion's fortunes, translated itself by a very human process to Hooker's consciousness as a piece of rank affectation. *He* would have been exalted and exultant in Clarence's place, consequently any other exhibition was only "airs." Nevertheless, at the present moment Clarence was to be placated.

"You did n't mind my telling that story about your savin' Susy as my own, did ye?" he said, with a hasty glance over his shoul-

der. "I only did it to fool the old man and women-folks, and make talk. You won't blow on me? Ye ain't mad about it?"

It had crossed Clarence's memory that when they were both younger Jim Hooker had once not only borrowed his story, but his name and personality as well. Yet in his loyalty to old memories there was mingled no resentment for past injury. "Of course not," he said, with a smile that was, however, still thoughtful. "Why should I? Only I ought to tell you that Susy Peyton is living with her adopted parents not ten miles from here, and it might reach their ears. She 's quite a young lady now, and if *I* would n't tell her story to strangers, I don't think *you* ought to, Jim."

He said this so pleasantly that even the skeptical Jim forgot what he believed were the "airs and graces" of self-abnegation, and said, "Let 's go inside, and I 'll introduce you," and turned to the house. But Clarence Brant drew back. "I 'm going on as soon as my horse is fed, for I 'm on a visit to Peyton, and I intend to push as far as Santa Inez still to-night. I want to talk with you about yourself, Jim," he added gently; "your prospects and your future.

I heard," he went on hesitatingly, "that you were — at work — in a restaurant in San Francisco. I 'm glad to see that you are at least your own master here," — he glanced at the wagon. "You are selling things, I suppose? For yourself, or another? Is that team yours? Come," he added, still pleasantly, but in an older and graver voice, with perhaps the least touch of experienced authority, "be frank, Jim. Which is it? Never mind what things you 've told *in there*, tell *me* the truth about yourself. Can I help you in any way? Believe me, I should like to. We have been old friends, whatever difference in our luck, I am yours still."

Thus adjured, the redoubtable Jim, in a hoarse whisper, with a furtive eye on the house, admitted that he was traveling for an itinerant peddler, whom he expected to join later in the settlement; that he had his own methods of disposing of his wares, and (darkly) that his proprietor and the world generally had better not interfere with him; that (with a return to more confidential lightness) he had already "worked the Wild West Injin" business so successfully as to dispose of his wares, particularly in yonder

house, and might do even more if not prematurely and wantonly "blown upon," "gone back on," or "given away."

"But would n't you like to settle down on some bit of land like this, and improve it for yourself?" said Clarence. "All these valley terraces are bound to rise in value, and meantime you would be independent. It could be managed, Jim. I think *I* could arrange it for you," he went on, with a slight glow of youthful enthusiasm. "Write to me at Peyton's ranch, and I 'll see you when I come back, and we 'll hunt up something for you together." As Jim received the proposition with a kind of gloomy embarrassment, he added lightly, with a glance at the farmhouse, "It might be near *here*, you know; and you 'd have pleasant neighbors, and even eager listeners to your old adventures."

"You 'd better come in a minit before you go," said Jim, clumsily evading a direct reply. Clarence hesitated a moment, and then yielded. For an equal moment Jim Hooker was torn between secret jealousy of his old comrade's graces and a desire to present them as familiar associations of his own. But his vanity was quickly appeased.

Need it be said that the two women received this fleck and foam of a super-civilization they knew little of as almost an impertinence compared to the rugged, gloomy, pathetic, and equally youthful hero of an adventurous wilderness of which they knew still less? What availed the courtesy and gentle melancholy of Clarence Brant beside the mysterious gloom and dark savagery of Red Jim? Yet they received him patronizingly, as one who was, like themselves, an admirer of manly grace and power, and the recipient of Jim's friendship. The farmer alone seemed to prefer Clarence, and yet the latter's tacit indorsement of Red Jim, through his evident previous intimacy with him, impressed the man in Jim's favor. All of which Clarence saw with that sensitive perception which had given him an early insight into human weakness, yet still had never shaken his youthful optimism. He smiled a little thoughtfully, but was openly fraternal to Jim, courteous to his host and family, and, as he rode away in the faint moonlight, magnificently opulent in his largess to the farmer, — his first and only assertion of his position.

The farmhouse, straggling barn, and

fringe of dusty willows, the white dome of the motionless wagon, with the hanging frying pans and kettles showing in the moonlight like black silhouettes against the staring canvas, all presently sank behind Clarence like the details of a dream, and he was alone with the moon, the hazy mystery of the level, grassy plain, and the monotony of the unending road. As he rode slowly along he thought of that other dreary plain, white with alkali patches and brown with rings of deserted camp-fires, known to his boyhood of deprivation, dependency, danger, and adventure, oddly enough, with a strange delight; and his later years of study, monastic seclusion, and final ease and independence, with an easy sense of wasted existence and useless waiting. He remembered his homeless childhood in the South, where servants and slaves took the place of the father he had never known, and the mother that he rarely saw; he remembered his abandonment to a mysterious female relation, where his natural guardians seemed to have overlooked and forgotten him, until he was sent, an all too young adventurer, to work his passage on an overland emigrant train across the plains; he remembered, as

yesterday, the fears, the hopes, the dreams and dangers of that momentous journey. He recalled his little playmate, Susy, and their strange adventures — the whole incident that the imaginative Jim Hooker had translated and rehearsed as his own — rose vividly before him. He thought of the cruel end of that pilgrimage, which again left him homeless and forgotten by even the relative he was seeking in a strange land. He remembered his solitary journey to the gold mines, taken with a boy's trust and a boy's fearlessness, and the strange protector he had found there, who had news of his missing kinsman; he remembered how this protector — whom he had at once instinctively loved — transferred him to the house of this new-found relation, who treated him kindly and sent him to the Jesuit school, but who never awakened in him a feeling of kinship. He dreamed again of his life at school, his accidental meeting with Susy at Santa Clara, the keen revival of his boyish love for his old playmate, now a pretty schoolgirl, the petted adopted child of wealthy parents. He recalled the terrible shock that interrupted this boyish episode: the news of the death of his protector, and the revelation

that this hard, silent, and mysterious man was his own father, whose reckless life and desperate reputation had impelled him to assume a disguise.

He remembered how his sudden accession to wealth and independence had half frightened him, and had always left a lurking sensitiveness that he was unfairly favored, by some mere accident, above his less lucky companions. The rude vices of his old associates had made him impatient of the feebler sensual indulgences of the later companions of his luxury, and exposed their hollow fascinations; his sensitive fastidiousness kept him clean among vulgar temptations; his clear perceptions were never blinded by selfish sophistry. Meantime his feeling for Susy remained unchanged. Pride had kept him from seeking the Peytons. His present visit was as unpremeditated as Peyton's invitation had been unlooked for by him. Yet he had not allowed himself to be deceived. He knew that this courtesy was probably due to the change in his fortune, although he had hoped it might have been some change in their opinion brought about by Susy. But he would at least see her again, not in the pretty, half-clandestine

way she had thought necessary, but openly and as her equal.

In his rapid ride he seemed to have suddenly penetrated the peaceful calm of the night. The restless irritation of the afternoon trade winds had subsided; the tender moonlight had hushed and tranquilly possessed the worried plain; the unending files of wild oats, far spaced and distinct, stood erect and motionless as trees; something of the sedate solemnity of a great forest seemed to have fallen upon their giant stalks. There was no dew. In that light, dry air, the heavier dust no longer rose beneath the heels of his horse, whose flying shadow passed over the field like a cloud, leaving no trail or track behind it. In the preoccupation of his thought and his breathless retrospect, the young man had ridden faster than he intended, and he now checked his panting horse. The influence of the night and the hushed landscape stole over him; his thoughts took a gentler turn; in that dim, mysterious horizon line before him, his future seemed to be dreamily peopled with airy, graceful shapes that more or less took the likeness of Susy. She was bright, coquettish, romantic, as he had last seen her;

she was older, graver, and thoughtfully welcome of him; or she was cold, distant, and severely forgetful of the past. How would her adopted father and mother receive him? Would they ever look upon him in the light of a suitor to the young girl? He had no fear of Peyton, — he understood his own sex, and, young as he was, knew already how to make himself respected; but how could he overcome that instinctive aversion which Mrs. Peyton had so often made him feel he had provoked? Yet in this dreamy hush of earth and sky, what was not possible? His boyish heart beat high with daring visions.

He saw Mrs. Peyton in the porch, welcoming him with that maternal smile which his childish longing had so often craved to share with Susy. Peyton would be there, too, — Peyton, who had once pushed back his torn straw hat to look approvingly in his boyish eyes; and Peyton, perhaps, might be proud of him.

Suddenly he started. A voice in his very ear!

"Bah! A yoke of vulgar cattle grazing on lands that were thine by right and law. Neither more nor less than that. And I

tell thee, Pancho, like cattle, to be driven off or caught and branded for one's own. Ha! There are those who could swear to the truth of this on the Creed. Ay! and bring papers stamped and signed by the governor's rubric to prove it. And not that I hate them, — bah! what are those heretic swine to me? But thou dost comprehend me? It galls and pricks me to see them swelling themselves with stolen husks, and men like thee, Pancho, ousted from their own land."

Clarence had halted in utter bewilderment. No one was visible before him, behind him, on either side. The words, in Spanish, came from the air, the sky, the distant horizon, he knew not which. Was he still dreaming? A strange shiver crept over his skin as if the air had grown suddenly chill. Then another mysterious voice arose, incredulous, half mocking, but equally distinct and clear.

"Caramba! What is this? You are wandering, friend Pancho. You are still smarting from his tongue. He has the grant confirmed by his brigand government; he has the *possession*, stolen by a thief like himself; and he has the Corregidors with

him. For is he not one of them himself, this Judge Peyton?"

Peyton! Clarence felt the blood rush back to his face in astonishment and indignation. His heels mechanically pressed his horse's flanks, and the animal sprang forward.

"*Guarda! Mira!*" said the voice again in a quicker, lower tone. But this time it was evidently in the field beside him, and the heads and shoulders of two horsemen emerged at the same moment from the tall ranks of wild oats. The mystery was solved. The strangers had been making their way along a lower level of the terraced plain, hidden by the grain, not twenty yards away, and parallel with the road they were now ascending to join. Their figures were alike formless in long striped *serapes*, and their features undistinguishable under stiff black sombreros.

"*Buenas noches*, señor," said the second voice, in formal and cautious deliberation.

A sudden inspiration made Clarence respond in English, as if he had not comprehended the stranger's words, "Eh?"

"Gooda-nighta," repeated the stranger.

"Oh, good-night," returned Clarence.

They passed him. Their spurs tinkled twice or thrice, their mustangs sprang forward, and the next moment the loose folds of their *serapes* were fluttering at their sides like wings in their flight.

CHAPTER IV.

After the chill of a dewless night the morning sun was apt to look ardently upon the Robles Rancho, if so strong an expression could describe the dry, oven-like heat of a Californian coast-range valley. Before ten o'clock the adobe wall of the *patio* was warm enough to permit lingering vacqueros and idle *peons* to lean against it, and the exposed *annexe* was filled with sharp, resinous odors from the oozing sap of unseasoned "redwood" boards, warped and drying in the hot sunshine. Even at that early hour the climbing Castilian roses were drooping against the wooden columns of the new veranda, scarcely older than themselves, and mingling an already faded spice with the aroma of baking wood and the more material fragrance of steaming coffee, that seemed dominant everywhere.

In fact, the pretty breakfast-room, whose three broad windows, always open to the veranda, gave an *al fresco* effect to every

meal, was a pathetic endeavor of the Southern-bred Peyton to emulate the soft, luxurious, and open-air indolence of his native South, in a climate that was not only *not* tropical, but even austere in its most fervid moments. Yet, although cold draughts invaded it from the rear that morning, Judge Peyton sat alone, between the open doors and windows, awaiting the slow coming of his wife and the young ladies. He was not in an entirely comfortable mood that morning. Things were not going on well at Robles. That truculent vagabond, Pedro, had, the night before, taken himself off with a curse that had frightened even the vacqueros, who most hated him as a companion, but who now seemed inclined to regard his absence as an injury done to their race. Peyton, uneasily conscious that his own anger had been excited by an exaggerated conception of the accident, was now, like most obstinate men, inclined to exaggerate the importance of Pedro's insolence. He was well out of it to get rid of this quarrelsome hanger-on, whose presumption and ill-humor threatened the discipline of the rancho, yet he could not entirely forget that he had employed him on account of his fam-

ily claims, and from a desire to placate racial jealousy and settle local differences. For the inferior Mexicans and Indian half-breeds still regarded their old masters with affection; were, in fact, more concerned for the integrity of their caste than the masters were themselves, and the old Spanish families who had made alliances with Americans, and shared their land with them, had rarely succeeded in alienating their retainers with their lands. Certain experiences in the proving of his grant before the Land Commission had taught Peyton that they were not to be depended upon. And lately there had been unpleasant rumors of the discovery of some unlooked-for claimants to a division of the grant itself, which might affect his own title.

He looked up quickly as voices and light steps on the veranda at last heralded the approach of his tardy household from the corridor. But, in spite of his preoccupation, he was startled and even awkwardly impressed with a change in Susy's appearance. She was wearing, for the first time, a long skirt, and this sudden maturing of her figure struck him, as a man, much more forcibly than it would probably have im-

pressed a woman, more familiar with details. He had not noticed certain indications of womanhood, as significant, perhaps, in her carriage as her outlines, which had been lately perfectly apparent to her mother and Mary, but which were to him now, for the first time, indicated by a few inches of skirt. She not only looked taller to his masculine eyes, but these few inches had added to the mystery as well as the drapery of the goddess; they were not so much the revelation of maturity as the suggestion that it was *hidden*. So impressed was he, that a half-serious lecture on her yesterday's childishness, the outcome of his irritated reflections that morning, died upon his lips. He felt he was no longer dealing with a child.

He welcomed them with that smile of bantering approbation, supposed to keep down inordinate vanity, which for some occult reason one always reserves for the members of one's own family. He was quite conscious that Susy was looking very pretty in this new and mature frock, and that as she stood beside his wife, far from ageing Mrs. Peyton's good looks and figure, she appeared like an equal companion, and that they mutually "became" one another.

This, and the fact that they were all, including Mary Rogers, in their freshest, gayest morning dresses, awakened a half-humorous, half-real apprehension in his mind, that he was now hopelessly surrounded by a matured sex, and in a weak minority.

"I think I ought to have been prepared," he began grimly, "for this addition to — to — the skirts of my family."

"Why, John," returned Mrs. Peyton quickly; "do you mean to say you have n't noticed that the poor child has for weeks been looking positively indecent?"

"Really, papa, I 've been a sight to behold. Have n't I, Mary?" chimed in Susy.

"Yes, dear. Why, Judge, I 've been wondering that Susy stood it so well, and never complained."

Peyton glanced around him at this compact feminine embattlement. It was as he feared. Yet even here he was again at fault.

"And," said Mrs. Peyton slowly, with the reserved significance of the feminine postscript in her voice, "if that Mr. Brant is coming here to-day, it would be just as well for him to see *that she is no longer a child, as when he knew her.*"

An hour later, good-natured Mary Rogers, in her character of "a dear," — which was usually indicated by the undertaking of small errands for her friend, — was gathering roses from the old garden for Susy's adornment, when she saw a vision which lingered with her for many a day. She had stopped to look through the iron *grille* in the adobe wall, across the open wind-swept plain. Miniature waves were passing over the wild oats, with glittering disturbances here and there in the depressions like the sparkling of green foam; the horizon line was sharply defined against the hard, steel-blue sky; everywhere the brand-new morning was shining with almost painted brilliancy; the vigor, spirit, and even crudeness of youth were over all. The young girl was dazzled and bewildered. Suddenly, as if blown out of the waving grain, or an incarnation of the vivid morning, the bright and striking figure of a youthful horseman flashed before the *grille*. It was Clarence Brant! Mary Rogers had always seen him, in the loyalty of friendship, with Susy's prepossessed eyes, yet she fancied that morning that he had never looked so handsome before. Even the foppish fripperies

of his riding-dress and silver trappings seemed as much the natural expression of conquering youth as the invincible morning sunshine. Perhaps it might have been a reaction against Susy's caprice or some latent susceptibility of her own; but a momentary antagonism to her friend stirred even her kindly nature. What right had Susy to trifle with such an opportunity? Who was *she* to hesitate over this gallant prince?

But Prince Charming's quick eyes had detected her, and the next moment his beautiful horse was beside the grating, and his ready hand of greeting extended through the bars.

"I suppose I am early and unexpected, but I slept at Santa Inez last night, that I might ride over in the cool of the morning. My things are coming by the stage-coach, later. It seemed such a slow way of coming one's self."

Mary Rogers's black eyes intimated that the way he had taken was the right one, but she gallantly recovered herself and remembered her position as confidante. And here was the opportunity of delivering Susy's warning unobserved. She withdrew her hand from Clarence's frank grasp, and pass-

ing it through the grating, patted the sleek, shining flanks of his horse, with a discreet division of admiration.

"And such a lovely creature, too! And Susy will be so delighted! and oh, Mr. Brant, please, you 're to say nothing of having met her at Santa Clara. It 's just as well not to begin with *that* here, for, you see" (with a large, maternal manner), "you were both *so* young then."

Clarence drew a quick breath. It was the first check to his vision of independence and equal footing! Then his invitation was *not* the outcome of a continuous friendship revived by Susy, as he had hoped; the Peytons had known nothing of his meeting with her, or perhaps they would not have invited him. He was here as an impostor, — and all because Susy had chosen to make a mystery of a harmless encounter, which might have been explained, and which they might have even countenanced. He thought bitterly of his old playmate for a brief moment, — as brief as Mary's antagonism. The young girl noticed the change in his face, but misinterpreted it.

"Oh, there 's no danger of its coming out if you don't say anything," she said,

quickly. "Ride on to the house, and don't wait for me. You 'll find them in the *patio* on the veranda."

Clarence moved on, but not as spiritedly as before. Nevertheless there was still dash enough about him and the animal he bestrode to stir into admiration the few lounging vacqueros of a country which was apt to judge the status of a rider by the quality of his horse. Nor was the favorable impression confined to them alone. Peyton's gratification rang out cheerily in his greeting: —

"Bravo, Clarence! You are here in true *caballero* style. Thanks for the compliment to the rancho."

For a moment the young man was transported back again to his boyhood, and once more felt Peyton's approving hand pushing back the worn straw hat from his childish forehead. A faint color rose to his cheeks; his eyes momentarily dropped. The highest art could have done no more! The slight aggressiveness of his youthful finery and picturesque good looks was condoned at once; his modesty conquered where self-assertion might have provoked opposition, and even Mrs. Peyton felt her-

self impelled to come forward with an outstretched hand scarcely less frank than her husband's. Then Clarence lifted his eyes. He saw before him the woman to whom his childish heart had gone out with the inscrutable longing and adoration of a motherless, homeless, companionless boy; the woman who had absorbed the love of his playmate without sharing it with him; who had showered her protecting and maternal caresses on Susy, a waif like himself, yet had not only left his heart lonely and desolate, but had even added to his childish distrust of himself the thought that he had excited her aversion. He saw her more beautiful than ever in her restored health, freshness of coloring, and mature roundness of outline. He was unconsciously touched with a man's admiration for her without losing his boyish yearnings and half-filial affection; in her new materialistic womanhood his youthful imagination had lifted her to a queen and goddess. There was all this appeal in his still boyish eyes, — eyes that had never yet known shame or fear in the expression of their emotions; there was all this in the gesture with which he lifted Mrs. Peyton's fingers to his lips. The little

group saw in this act only a Spanish courtesy in keeping with his accepted rôle. But a thrill of surprise, of embarrassment, of intense gratification passed over her. For he had not even looked at Susy!

Her relenting was graceful. She welcomed him with a winning smile. Then she motioned pleasantly towards Susy.

"But here is an older friend, Mr. Brant, whom you do not seem to recognize, — Susy, whom you have not seen since she was a child."

A quick flush rose to Clarence's cheek. The group smiled at this evident youthful confession of some boyish admiration. But Clarence knew that his truthful blood was merely resenting the deceit his lips were sealed from divulging. He did not dare to glance at Susy; it added to the general amusement that the young girl was obliged to present herself. But in this interval she had exchanged glances with Mary Rogers, who had rejoined the group, and she knew she was safe. She smiled with gracious condescension at Clarence; observed, with the patronizing superiority of age and established position, that he had *grown*, but had not greatly changed, and, it is needless to

say, again filled her mother's heart with joy. Clarence, still intoxicated with Mrs. Peyton's kindliness, and, perhaps, still embarrassed by remorse, had not time to remark the girl's studied attitude. He shook hands with her cordially, and then, in the quick reaction of youth, accepted with humorous gravity the elaborate introduction to Mary Rogers by Susy, which completed this little comedy. And if, with a woman's quickness, Mrs. Peyton detected a certain lingering glance which passed between Mary Rogers and Clarence, and misinterpreted it, it was only a part of that mystification into which these youthful actors are apt to throw their mature audiences.

"Confess, Ally," said Peyton, cheerfully, as the three young people suddenly found their tongues with aimless vivacity and inconsequent laughter, and started with unintelligible spirits for an exploration of the garden, "confess now that your *bête noir* is really a very manly as well as a very presentable young fellow. By Jove! the *padres* have made a Spanish swell out of him without spoiling the Brant grit, either! Come, now; you 're not afraid that Susy's style will suffer from *his* companionship. 'Pon

my soul, she might borrow a little of his courtesy to his elders without indelicacy. I only wish she had as sincere a way of showing her respect for you as he has. Did you notice that he really did n't seem to see anybody else but you at first? And yet you never were a friend to him, like Susy."

The lady tossed her head slightly, but smiled.

"This is the first time he 's seen Mary Rogers, is n't it?" she said meditatively.

"I reckon. But what 's that to do with his politeness to you?"

"And do her parents know him?" she continued, without replying.

"How do I know? I suppose everybody has heard of him. Why ?"

"Because I think they 've taken a fancy to each other."

"What in the name of folly, Ally" — began the despairing Peyton.

"When you invite a handsome, rich, and fascinating young man into the company of young ladies, John," returned Mrs. Peyton, in her severest manner, "you must not forget you owe a certain responsibility to the parents. I shall certainly look after Miss Rogers."

CHAPTER V.

ALTHOUGH the three young people had left the veranda together, when they reached the old garden Clarence and Susy found themselves considerably in advance of Mary Rogers, who had become suddenly and deeply interested in the beauty of a passion vine near the gate. At the first discovery of their isolation their voluble exchange of information about themselves and their occupations since their last meeting stopped simultaneously. Clarence, who had forgotten his momentary irritation, and had recovered his old happiness in her presence, was nevertheless conscious of some other change in her than that suggested by the lengthened skirt and the later and more delicate accentuation of her prettiness. It was not her affectation of superiority and older social experience, for that was only the outcome of what he had found charming in her as a child, and which he still good-humoredly accepted; nor was it her charac-

teristic exaggeration of speech, which he still pleasantly recognized. It was something else, vague and indefinite, — something that had been unnoticed while Mary was with them, but had now come between them like some unknown presence which had taken the confidante's place. He remained silent, looking at her half-brightening cheek and conscious profile. Then he spoke with awkward directness.

"You are changed, Susy, more than in looks."

"Hush," said the girl in a tragic whisper, with a warning gesture towards the blandly unconscious Mary.

"But," returned Clarence wonderingly, "she 's your — our friend, you know."

"I *don't* know," said Susy, in a still deeper tone, "that is — oh, don't ask me! But when you 're always surrounded by spies, when you can't say your soul is your own, you doubt everybody!" There was such a pretty distress in her violet eyes and curving eyebrows, that Clarence, albeit vague as to its origin and particulars, nevertheless possessed himself of the little hand that was gesticulating dangerously near his own, and pressed it sympathetically. Per-

haps preoccupied with her emotions, she did not immediately withdraw it, as she went on rapidly: "And if you were cooped up here, day after day, behind these bars," pointing to the *grille*, "you 'd know what I suffer."

"But" — began Clarence.

"Hush!" said Susy, with a stamp of her little foot.

Clarence, who had only wished to point out that the whole lower end of the garden wall was in ruins and the *grille* really was no prevention, "hushed."

"And listen! Don't pay me much attention to-day, but talk to *her*," indicating the still discreet and distant Mary, "before father and mother. Not a word to her of this confidence, Clarence. To-morrow ride out alone on your beautiful horse, and come back by way of the woods, beyond our turning, at four o'clock. There 's a trail to the right of the big *madroño* tree. Take that. Be careful and keep a good lookout, for she must n't see you."

"Who must n't see me?" said the puzzled Clarence.

"Why, Mary, of course, you silly boy!" returned the girl impatiently. "She 'll be

looking for *me*. Go now, Clarence! Stop! Look at that lovely big maiden's-blush up there," pointing to a pink-suffused specimen of rose *grandiflora* hanging on the wall. "Get it, Clarence, — that one, — I 'll show you where, — there!" They had already plunged into the leafy bramble, and, standing on tiptoe, with her hand on his shoulder and head upturned, Susy's cheek had innocently approached Clarence's own. At this moment Clarence, possibly through some confusion of color, fragrance, or softness of contact, seemed to have availed himself of the opportunity, in a way which caused Susy to instantly rejoin Mary Rogers with affected dignity, leaving him to follow a few moments later with the captured flower.

Without trying to understand the reason of to-morrow's rendezvous, and perhaps not altogether convinced of the reality of Susy's troubles, he, however, did not find that difficulty in carrying out her other commands which he had expected. Mrs. Peyton was still gracious, and, with feminine tact, induced him to talk of himself, until she was presently in possession of his whole history, barring the episode of his meeting with Susy, since he had parted with them. He felt a

strange satisfaction in familiarly pouring out his confidences to this superior woman, whom he had always held in awe. There was a new delight in her womanly interest in his trials and adventures, and a subtle pleasure even in her half-motherly criticism and admonition of some passages. I am afraid he forgot Susy, who listened with the complacency of an exhibitor; Mary, whose black eyes dilated alternately with sympathy for the performer and deprecation of Mrs. Peyton's critical glances; and Peyton, who, however, seemed lost in thought, and preoccupied. Clarence was happy. The softly shaded lights in the broad, spacious, comfortably furnished drawing-room shone on the group before him. It was a picture of refined domesticity which the homeless Clarence had never known except as a vague, half-painful, boyish remembrance; it was a realization of welcome that far exceeded his wildest boyish vision of the preceding night. With that recollection came another, — a more uneasy one. He remembered how that vision had been interrupted by the strange voices in the road, and their vague but ominous import to his host. A feeling of self-reproach came over him. The threats

had impressed him as only mere braggadocio, — he knew the characteristic exaggeration of the race, — but perhaps he ought to privately tell Peyton of the incident at once.

The opportunity came later, when the ladies had retired, and Peyton, wrapped in a *poncho* in a rocking-chair, on the now chilly veranda, looked up from his reverie and a cigar. Clarence casually introduced the incident, as if only for the sake of describing the supernatural effect of the hidden voices, but he was concerned to see that Peyton was considerably disturbed by their more material import. After questioning him as to the appearance of the two men, his host said: "I don't mind telling you, Clarence, that as far as that fellow's intentions go he is quite sincere, although his threats are only borrowed thunder. He is a man whom I have just dismissed for carelessness and insolence, — two things that run in double harness in this country, — but I should be more afraid to find him at my back on a dark night, alone on the plains, than to confront him in daylight, in the witness box, against me. He was only repeating a silly rumor that the title to this

rancho and the nine square leagues beyond would be attacked by some speculators."

"But I thought your title was confirmed two years ago," said Clarence.

"The *grant* was confirmed," returned Peyton, "which means that the conveyance of the Mexican government of these lands to the ancestor of Victor Robles was held to be legally proven by the United States Land Commission, and a patent issued to all those who held under it. I and my neighbors hold under it by purchase from Victor Robles, subject to the confirmation of the Land Commission. But that confirmation was only of Victor's *great-grandfather's title*, and it is now alleged that as Victor's father died without making a will, Victor has claimed and disposed of property which he ought to have divided with his *sisters*. At least, some speculating rascals in San Francisco have set up what they call 'the Sisters' title,' and are selling it to actual settlers on the unoccupied lands beyond. As, by the law, it would hold possession against the mere ordinary squatters, whose only right is based, as you know, on the presumption that there is *no title claimed*, it gives the possessor immunity to enjoy the

use of the property until the case is decided, and even should the original title hold good against his, the successful litigant would probably be willing to pay for improvements and possession to save the expensive and tedious process of ejectment."

"But this does not affect *you*, who have already possession?" said Clarence quickly.

"No, not as far as *this house* and the lands I actually *occupy and cultivate* are concerned; and they know that I am safe to fight to the last, and carry the case to the Supreme Court in that case, until the swindle is exposed, or they drop it; but I may have to pay them something to keep the squatters off my *unoccupied* land."

"But you surely would n't recognize those rascals in any way?" said the astonished Clarence.

"As against other rascals? Why not?" returned Peyton grimly. "I only pay for the possession which their sham title gives me to my own land. If by accident that title obtains, I am still on the safe side." After a pause he said, more gravely, "What you overheard, Clarence, shows me that the plan is more forward than I had imagined, and that I may have to fight traitors here."

"I hope, sir," said Clarence, with a quick glow in his earnest face, "that you 'll let me help you. You thought I did once, you remember, — with the Indians."

There was so much of the old Clarence in his boyish appeal and eager, questioning face that Peyton, who had been talking to him as a younger but equal man of affairs, was startled into a smile. "You did, Clarence, though the Indians butchered your friends, after all. I don't know, though, but that your experiences with those Spaniards — you must have known a lot of them when you were with Don Juan Robinson and at the college — might be of service in getting at evidence, or smashing their witnesses if it comes to a fight. But just now, *money* is everything. They must be bought *off the land* if I have to mortgage it for the purpose. That strikes you as a rather heroic remedy, Clarence, eh?" he continued, in his old, half-bantering attitude towards Clarence's inexperienced youth, "don't it?"

But Clarence was not thinking of that. Another more audacious but equally youthful and enthusiastic idea had taken possession of his mind, and he lay awake half that night revolving it. It was true that it was

somewhat impractically mixed with his visions of Mrs. Peyton and Susy, and even included his previous scheme of relief for the improvident and incorrigible Hooker. But it gave a wonderful sincerity and happiness to his slumbers that night, which the wiser and elder Peyton might have envied, and I wot not was in the long run as correct and sagacious as Peyton's sleepless cogitations. And in the early morning Mr. Clarence Brant, the young capitalist, sat down to his traveling-desk and wrote two clear-headed, logical, and practical business letters, — one to his banker, and the other to his former guardian, Don Juan Robinson, — as his first step in a resolve that was, nevertheless, perhaps as wildly quixotic and enthusiastic as any dream his boyish and unselfish heart had ever indulged.

At breakfast, in the charmed freedom of the domestic circle, Clarence forgot Susy's capricious commands of yesterday, and began to address himself to her in his old earnest fashion, until he was warned by a significant knitting of the young lady's brows and monosyllabic responses. But in his youthful loyalty to Mrs. Peyton, he was more pained to notice Susy's occasional un-

conscious indifference to her adopted mother's affectionate expression, and a more conscious disregard of her wishes. So uneasy did he become, in his sensitive concern for Mrs. Peyton's half-concealed mortification, that he gladly accepted Peyton's offer to go with him to visit the farm and corral. As the afternoon approached, with another twinge of self-reproach, he was obliged to invent some excuse to decline certain hospitable plans of Mrs. Peyton's for his entertainment, and at half past three stole somewhat guiltily, with his horse, from the stables. But he had to pass before the outer wall of the garden and *grille*, through which he had seen Mary the day before. Raising his eyes mechanically, he was startled to see Mrs. Peyton standing behind the grating, with her abstracted gaze fixed upon the wind-tossed, level grain beyond her. She smiled as she saw him, but there were traces of tears in her proud, handsome eyes.

"You are going to ride?" she said pleasantly.

"Y-e-es," stammered the shamefaced Clarence.

She glanced at him wistfully.

"You are right. The girls have gone

away by themselves. Mr. Peyton has ridden over to Santa Inez on this dreadful land business, and I suppose you 'd have found him a dull riding companion. It is rather stupid here. I quite envy you, Mr. Brant, your horse and your freedom."

"But, Mrs. Peyton," broke in Clarence, impulsively, "you have a horse — I saw it, a lovely lady's horse — eating its head off in the stable. Won't you let me run back and order it; and won't you, please, come out with me for a good, long gallop?"

He meant what he said. He had spoken quickly, impulsively, but with the perfect understanding in his own mind that his proposition meant the complete abandonment of his rendezvous with Susy. Mrs. Peyton was astounded and slightly stirred with his earnestness, albeit unaware of all it implied.

"It 's a great temptation, Mr. Brant," she said, with a playful smile, which dazzled Clarence with its first faint suggestion of a refined woman's coquetry; "but I 'm afraid that Mr. Peyton would think me going mad in my old age. No. Go on and enjoy your gallop, and if you should see those giddy girls anywhere, send them home early for chocolate, before the cold wind gets up."

She turned, waved her slim white hand playfully in acknowledgment of Clarence's bared head, and moved away.

For the first few moments the young man tried to find relief in furious riding, and in bullying his spirited horse. Then he pulled quickly up. What was he doing? What was he going to do? What foolish, vapid deceit was this that he was going to practice upon that noble, queenly, confiding, generous woman? (He had already forgotten that she had always distrusted him.) What a fool he was not to tell her half-jokingly that he expected to meet Susy! But would he have dared to talk half-jokingly to such a woman on such a topic? And would it have been honorable without disclosing the *whole* truth, — that they had met secretly before? And was it fair to Susy? — dear, innocent, childish Susy! Yet something must be done! It was such trivial, purposeless deceit, after all; for this noble woman, Mrs. Peyton, so kind, so gentle, would never object to his loving Susy and marrying her. And they would all live happily together; and Mrs. Peyton would never be separated from them, but always beaming tenderly upon them as she did just

now in the garden. Yes, he would have a serious understanding with Susy, and that would excuse the clandestine meeting to-day.

His rapid pace, meantime, had brought him to the imperceptible incline of the terrace, and he was astonished, in turning in the saddle, to find that the *casa*, corral, and outbuildings had completely vanished, and that behind him rolled only the long sea of grain, which seemed to have swallowed them in its yellowing depths. Before him lay the wooded ravine through which the stage-coach passed, which was also the entrance to the rancho, and there, too, probably, was the turning of which Susy had spoken. But it was still early for the rendezvous; indeed, he was in no hurry to meet her in his present discontented state, and he made a listless circuit of the field, in the hope of discovering the phenomena that had caused the rancho's mysterious disappearance. When he had found that it was the effect of the different levels, his attention was arrested by a multitude of moving objects in a still more distant field, which proved to be a band of wild horses. In and out among them, circling aimlessly, as it seemed to him, appeared two horsemen apparently

performing some mystic evolution. To add to their singular performance, from time to time one of the flying herd, driven by the horsemen far beyond the circle of its companions, dropped suddenly and unaccountably in full career. The field closed over it as if it had been swallowed up. In a few moments it appeared again, trotting peacefully behind its former pursuer. It was some time before Clarence grasped the meaning of this strange spectacle. Although the clear, dry atmosphere sharply accented the silhouette-like outlines of the men and horses, so great was the distance that the slender forty-foot lasso, which in the skillful hands of the horsemen had effected these captures, was *completely invisible!* The horsemen were Peyton's vacqueros, making a selection from the young horses for the market. He remembered now that Peyton had told him that he might be obliged to raise money by sacrificing some of his stock, and the thought brought back Clarence's uneasiness as he turned again to the trail. Indeed, he was hardly in the vein for a gentle tryst, as he entered the wooded ravine to seek the *madroño* tree which was to serve as a guide to his lady's bower.

A few rods further, under the cool vault filled with woodland spicing, he came upon it. In its summer harlequin dress of scarlet and green, with hanging bells of polytinted berries, like some personified sylvan Folly, it seemed a fitting symbol of Susy's childish masquerade of passion. Its bizarre beauty, so opposed to the sober gravity of the sedate pines and hemlocks, made it an unmistakable landmark. Here he dismounted and picketed his horse. And here, beside it, to the right, ran the little trail crawling over mossy boulders; a narrow yellow track through the carpet of pine needles between the closest file of trees; an almost imperceptible streak across pools of chickweed at their roots, and a brown and ragged swath through the ferns. As he went on, the anxiety and uneasiness that had possessed him gave way to a languid intoxication of the senses; the mysterious seclusion of these woodland depths recovered the old influence they had exerted over his boyhood. He was not returning to Susy, as much as to the older love of his youth, of which she was, perhaps, only an incident. It was therefore with an odd boyish thrill again that, coming suddenly upon a little

hollow, like a deserted nest, where the lost trail made him hesitate, he heard the crackle of a starched skirt behind him, was conscious of the subtle odor of freshly ironed and scented muslin, and felt the gentle pressure of delicate fingers upon his eyes.

"Susy!"

"You silly boy! Where were you blundering to? Why didn't you look around you?"

"I thought I would hear your voices."

"Whose voices, idiot?"

"Yours and Mary's," returned Clarence innocently, looking round for the confidante.

"Oh, indeed! Then you wanted to see *Mary?* Well, she 's looking for me somewhere. Perhaps you 'll go and find her, or shall I?"

She was offering to pass him when he laid his hand on hers to detain her. She instantly evaded it, and drew herself up to her full height, incontestably displaying the dignity of the added inches to her skirt. All this was charmingly like the old Susy, but it did not bid fair to help him to a serious interview. And, looking at the pretty, pink, mocking face before him, with the witchery of the woodland still upon him,

he began to think that he had better put it off.

"Never mind about Mary," he said laughingly. "But you said you wanted to see me, Susy; and here I am."

"Said I wanted to see you?" repeated Susy, with her blue eyes lifted in celestial scorn and wonderment. "Said *I* wanted to see you? Are you not mistaken, Mr. Brant? Really, I imagined that you came here to see *me*."

With her fair head upturned, and the leaf of her scarlet lip temptingly curled over, Clarence began to think this latest phase of her extravagance the most fascinating. He drew nearer to her as he said gently, "You know what I mean, Susy. You said yesterday you were troubled. I thought you might have something to tell me."

"I should think it was *you* who might have something to tell me after all these years," she said poutingly, yet self-possessed. "But I suppose you came here only to see Mary and mother. I 'm sure you let them know that plainly enough last evening."

"But you said" — began the stupefied Clarence.

"Never mind what *I* said. It 's always what *I* say, never what *you* say; and you don't say anything."

The woodland influence must have been still very strong upon Clarence that he did not discover in all this that, while Susy's general capriciousness was unchanged, there was a new and singular insincerity in her manifest acting. She was either concealing the existence of some other real emotion, or assuming one that was absent. But he did not notice it, and only replied tenderly: —

"But I want to say a great deal to you, Susy. I want to say that if you still feel as I do, and as I have always felt, and you think you could be happy as *I* would be if — if — we could be always together, we need not conceal it from your mother and father any longer. I am old enough to speak for myself, and I am my own master. Your mother has been very kind to me, — so kind that it does n't seem quite right to deceive her, — and when I tell her that I love you, and that I want you to be my wife, I believe she will give us her blessing."

Susy uttered a strange little laugh, and with an assumption of coyness, that was,

however, still affected, stooped to pick a few berries from a *manzanita* bush.

"I 'll tell you what she 'll say, Clarence. She 'll say you 're frightfully young, and so you are!"

The young fellow tried to echo the laugh, but felt as if he had received a blow. For the first time he was conscious of the truth: this girl, whom he had fondly regarded as a child, had already passed him in the race; she had become a woman before he was yet a man, and now stood before him, maturer in her knowledge, and older in her understanding, of herself and of him. This was the change that had perplexed him; this was the presence that had come between them, — a Susy he had never known before.

She laughed at his changed expression, and then swung herself easily to a sitting posture on the low projecting branch of a hemlock. The act was still girlish, but, nevertheless, she looked down upon him in a superior, patronizing way. "Now, Clarence," she said, with a half-abstracted manner, "don't you be a big fool! If you talk that way to mother, she 'll only tell you to wait two or three years until you know your own mind, and she 'll pack me off to

that horrid school again, besides watching me like a cat every moment you are here. If you want to stay here, and see me sometimes like this, you 'll just behave as you have done, and say nothing. Do you see? Perhaps you don't care to come, or are satisfied with Mary and mother. Say so, then. Goodness knows, I don't want to force you to come here."

Modest and reserved as Clarence was generally, I fear that bashfulness of approach to the other sex was not one of these indications. He walked up to Susy with appalling directness, and passed his arm around her waist. She did not move, but remained looking at him and his intruding arm with a certain critical curiosity, as if awaiting some novel sensation. At which he kissed her. She then slowly disengaged his arm, and said: —

"Really, upon my word, Clarence," in perfectly level tones, and slipped quietly to the ground.

He again caught her in his arms, encircling her disarranged hair and part of the beribboned hat hanging over her shoulder, and remained for an instant holding her thus silently and tenderly. Then she

freed herself with an abstracted air, a half smile, and an unchanged color except where her soft cheek had been abraded by his coat collar.

"You 're a bold, rude boy, Clarence," she said, putting back her hair quietly, and straightening the brim of her hat. "Heaven knows where you learned manners!" and then, from a safer distance, with the same critical look in her violet eyes, "I suppose you think mother would allow *that* if she knew it?"

But Clarence, now completely subjugated, with the memory of the kiss upon him and a heightened color, protested that he only wanted to make their intercourse less constrained, and to have their relations, even their engagement, recognized by her parents; still he would take her advice. Only there was always the danger that if they were discovered she would be sent back to the convent all the same, and his banishment, instead of being the probation of a few years, would be a perpetual separation.

"We could always run away, Clarence," responded the young girl calmly. "There 's nothing the matter with *that*."

Clarence was startled. The idea of deso-

lating the sad, proud, handsome Mrs. Peyton, whom he worshiped, and her kind husband, whom he was just about to serve, was so grotesque and confusing, that he said hopelessly, "Yes."

"Of course," she continued, with the same odd affectation of coyness, which was, however, distinctly uncalled for, as she eyed him from under her broad hat, "you need n't come with me unless you like. I can run away by myself, — if I want to! I 've thought of it before. One can't stand everything!"

"But, Susy," said Clarence, with a swift remorseful recollection of her confidence yesterday, "is there really anything troubles you? Tell me, dear. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing — *everything!* It 's no use, — *you* can't understand! *You* like it, I know you do. I can see it; it 's your style. But it 's stupid, it 's awful, Clarence! With mamma snooping over you and around you all day, with her 'dear child,' 'mamma's pet,' and 'What is it, dear?' and 'Tell it all to your own mamma,' — as if I would! And 'my own mamma,' indeed! As if I did n't know, Clarence, that she *is n't.* And papa, caring for nothing but this hid-

eous, dreary rancho, and the huge, empty plains. It 's worse than school, for there, at least, when you went out, you could see something besides cattle and horses and yellow-faced half-breeds! But here — Lord! it 's only a wonder I have n't run away before!"

Startled and shocked as Clarence was at this revelation, accompanied as it was by a hardness of manner that was new to him, the influence of the young girl was still so strong upon him that he tried to evade it as only an extravagance, and said with a faint smile, "But where would you run to?"

She looked at him cunningly, with her head on one side, and then said: —

"I have friends, and" —

She hesitated, pursing up her pretty lips.

"And what?"

"Relations."

"Relations?"

"Yes, — an aunt by marriage. She lives in Sacramento. She 'd be overjoyed to have me come to her. Her second husband has a theatre there."

"But, Susy, what does Mrs. Peyton know of this?"

"Nothing. Do you think I 'd tell her, and have her buy them up as she has my other relations? Do you suppose I don't know that I 've been bought up like a nigger?"

She looked indignant, compressing her delicate little nostrils, and yet, somehow, Clarence had the same singular impression that she was only acting.

The calling of a far-off voice came faintly through the wood.

"That 's Mary, looking for me," said Susy composedly. "You must go, now, Clarence. Quick! Remember what I said, — and don't breathe a word of this. Good-by."

But Clarence was standing still, breathless, hopelessly disturbed, and irresolute. Then he turned away mechanically towards the trail.

"Well, Clarence?"

She was looking at him half reproachfully, half coquettishly, with smiling, parted lips. He hastened to forget himself and his troubles upon them twice and thrice. Then she quickly disengaged herself, whispered, "Go, now," and, as Mary's call was repeated, Clarence heard her voice, high and

clear, answering, "Here, dear," as he was plunging into the thicket.

He had scarcely reached the *madroño* tree again and remounted his horse, before he heard the sound of hoofs approaching from the road. In his present uneasiness he did not care to be discovered so near the rendezvous, and drew back into the shadow until the horseman should pass. It was Peyton, with a somewhat disturbed face, riding rapidly. Still less was he inclined to join or immediately follow him, but he was relieved when his host, instead of taking the direct road to the rancho, through the wild oats, turned off in the direction of the corral.

A moment later Clarence wheeled into the direct road, and presently found himself in the long afternoon shadows through the thickest of the grain. He was riding slowly, immersed in thought, when he was suddenly startled by a hissing noise at his ear, and what seemed to be the uncoiling stroke of a leaping serpent at his side. Instinctively he threw himself forward on his horse's neck, and as the animal shied into the grain, felt the crawling scrape and jerk of a horsehair lariat across his back and

down his horse's flanks. He reined in indignantly and stood up in his stirrups. Nothing was to be seen above the level of the grain. Beneath him the trailing *riata* had as noiselessly vanished as if it had been indeed a gliding snake. Had he been the victim of a practical joke, or of the blunder of some stupid vacquero? For he made no doubt that it was the lasso of one of the performers he had watched that afternoon. But his preoccupied mind did not dwell long upon it, and by the time he had reached the wall of the old garden, the incident was forgotten.

CHAPTER VI.

Relieved of Clarence Brant's embarrassing presence, Jim Hooker did not, however, refuse to avail himself of that opportunity to expound to the farmer and his family the immense wealth, influence, and importance of the friend who had just left him. Although Clarence's plan had suggested reticence, Hooker could not forego the pleasure of informing them that "Clar" Brant had just offered to let him into an extensive land speculation. He had previously declined a large share or original location in a mine of Clarence's, now worth a million, because it was not "his style." But the land speculation in a country of unsettled titles and lawless men, he need not remind them, required some experience of border warfare. He would not say positively, although he left them to draw their own conclusions with gloomy significance, that this was why Clarence had sought him. With this dark suggestion, he took leave of Mr.

and Mrs. Hopkins and their daughter Phœbe the next day, not without some natural human emotion, and peacefully drove his team and wagon into the settlement of Fair Plains.

He was not prepared, however, for a sudden realization of his imaginative prospects. A few days after his arrival in Fair Plains, he received a letter from Clarence, explaining that he had not time to return to Hooker to consult him, but had, nevertheless, fulfilled his promise, by taking advantage of an opportunity of purchasing the Spanish "Sisters'" title to certain unoccupied lands near the settlement. As these lands in part joined the section already preëmpted and occupied by Hopkins, Clarence thought that Jim Hooker would choose that part for the sake of his neighbor's company. He inclosed a draft on San Francisco, for a sum sufficient to enable Jim to put up a cabin and "stock" the property, which he begged he would consider in the light of a loan, to be paid back in installments, only when the property could afford it. At the same time, if Jim was in difficulty, he was to inform him. The letter closed with a characteristic Clarence-like mingling of enthusiasm

and older wisdom. "I wish you luck, Jim, but I see no reason why you should trust to it. I don't know of anything that could keep you from making yourself independent of any one, if you go to work with a *long aim* and don't fritter away your chances on short ones. If I were you, old fellow, I'd drop the Plains and the Indians out of my thoughts, or at least out of my *talk*, for a while; they won't help you in the long run. The people who believe you will be jealous of you; those who don't, will look down upon you, and if they get to questioning your little Indian romances, Jim, they 'll be apt to question your civilized facts. That won't help you in the ranching business and that 's your only real grip now." For the space of two or three hours after this, Jim was reasonably grateful and even subdued, — so much so that his employer, to whom he confided his good fortune, frankly confessed that he believed him from that unusual fact alone. Unfortunately, neither the practical lesson conveyed in this grim admission, nor the sentiment of gratitude, remained long with Jim. Another idea had taken possession of his fancy. Although the land nominated in his bill of sale had

been, except on the occasion of his own temporary halt there, always unoccupied, unsought, and unclaimed, and although he was amply protected by legal certificates, he gravely collected a posse of three or four idlers from Fair Plains, armed them at his own expense, and in the dead of night took belligerent and forcible possession of the peaceful domain which the weak generosity and unheroic dollars of Clarence had purchased for him! A martial camp-fire tempered the chill night winds to the pulses of the invaders, and enabled them to sleep on their arms in the field they had won. The morning sun revealed to the astonished Hopkins family the embattled plain beyond, with its armed sentries. Only then did Jim Hooker condescend to explain the reason of his warlike occupation, with dark hints of the outlying "squatters" and "jumpers," whose incursions their boldness alone had repulsed. The effect of this romantic situation upon the two women, with the slight fascination of danger imported into their quiet lives, may well be imagined. Possibly owing to some incautious questioning by Mr. Hopkins, and some doubts of the discipline and sincerity of his posse, Jim dis-

charged them the next day; but during the erection of his cabin by some peaceful carpenters from the settlement, he returned to his gloomy preoccupation and the ostentatious wearing of his revolvers. As an opulent and powerful neighbor, he took his meals with the family while his house was being built, and generally impressed them with a sense of security they had never missed.

Meantime, Clarence, duly informed of the installation of Jim as his tenant, underwent a severe trial. It was necessary for his plans that this should be kept a secret at present, and this was no easy thing for his habitually frank and open nature. He had once mentioned that he had met Jim at the settlement, but the information was received with such indifference by Susy, and such marked disfavor by Mrs. Peyton, that he said no more. He accompanied Peyton in his rides around the rancho, fully possessed himself of the details of its boundaries, the debatable lands held by the enemy, and listened with beating pulses, but a hushed tongue, to his host's ill-concealed misgivings.

"You see, Clarence, that lower terrace?"

he said, pointing to a far-reaching longitudinal plain beyond the corral; "it extends from my corral to Fair Plains. That is claimed by the sisters' title, and, as things appear to be going, if a division of the land is made it will be theirs. It 's bad enough to have this best grazing land lying just on the flanks of the corral held by these rascals at an absurd prohibitory price, but I am afraid that it may be made to mean something even worse. According to the old surveys, these terraces on different levels were the natural divisions of the property, — one heir or his tenant taking one, and another taking another, — an easy distinction that saved the necessity of boundary fencing or monuments, and gave no trouble to people who were either kinsmen or lived in lazy patriarchal concord. That is the form of division they are trying to reëstablish now. Well," he continued, suddenly lifting his eyes to the young man's flushed face, in some unconscious, sympathetic response to his earnest breathlessness, "although my boundary line extends half a mile into that field, my house and garden and corral *are actually upon that terrace or level.*" They certainly appeared to Clarence

to be on the same line as the long field beyond. "If," went on Peyton, "such a decision is made, these men will push on and claim the house and everything on the terrace."

"But," said Clarence quickly, "you said their title was only valuable where they have got or can give *possession*. You already have yours. They can't take it from you except by force."

"No," said Peyton grimly, "nor will they dare to do it as long as I live to fight them."

"But," persisted Clarence, with the same singular hesitancy of manner, "why did n't you purchase possession of at least that part of the land which lies so dangerously near your own house?"

"Because it was held by squatters, who naturally preferred buying what might prove a legal title to their land from these impostors than to sell out their possession to *me* at a fair price."

"But could n't you have bought from them both?" continued Clarence.

"My dear Clarence, I am not a Crœsus nor a fool. Only a man who was both would attempt to treat with these rascals, who would now, of course, insist that *their*

whole claim should be bought up at their own price by the man who was most concerned in defeating them."

He turned away a little impatiently. Fortunately he did not observe that Clarence's averted face was crimson with embarrassment, and that a faint smile hovered nervously about his mouth.

Since his late rendezvous with Susy, Clarence had had no chance to interrogate her further regarding her mysterious relative. That that shadowy presence was more or less exaggerated, if not an absolute myth, he more than half suspected, but of the discontent that had produced it, or the recklessness it might provoke, there was no doubt. She might be tempted to some act of folly. He wondered if Mary Rogers knew it. Yet, with his sensitive ideas of loyalty, he would have shrunk from any confidence with Mary regarding her friend's secrets, although he fancied that Mary's dark eyes sometimes dwelt upon him with mournful consciousness and premonition. He did not imagine the truth, that this romantic contemplation was only the result of Mary's conviction that Susy was utterly unworthy of his love. It so chanced one

morning that the vacquero who brought the post from Santa Inez arrived earlier than usual, and so anticipated the two girls, who usually made a youthful point of meeting him first as he passed the garden wall. The letter bag was consequently delivered to Mrs. Peyton in the presence of the others, and a look of consternation passed between the young girls. But Mary quickly seized upon the bag as if with girlish and mischievous impatience, opened it, and glanced within it.

"There are only three letters for you," she said, handing them to Clarence, with a quick look of significance, which he failed to comprehend, "and nothing for me or Susy."

"But," began the innocent Clarence, as his first glance at the letters showed him that one was directed to Susy, "here is"—

A wicked pinch on his arm that was nearest Mary stopped his speech, and he quickly put the letters in his pocket.

"Did n't you understand that Susy don't want her mother to see that letter?" asked Mary impatiently, when they were alone a moment later.

"No," said Clarence simply, handing her the missive.

Mary took it and turned it over in her hands.

"It 's in a man's handwriting," she said innocently.

"I had n't noticed it," returned Clarence with invincible naïveté, "but perhaps it is."

"And you hand it over for me to give to Susy, and ain't a bit curious to know who it 's from?"

"No," returned Clarence, opening his big eyes in smiling and apologetic wonder.

"Well," responded the young lady, with a long breath of melancholy astonishment, "certainly, of all things you are — you really *are!*" With which incoherency — apparently perfectly intelligible to herself — she left him. She had not herself the slightest idea who the letter was from; she only knew that Susy wanted it concealed.

The incident made little impression on Clarence, except as part of the general uneasiness he felt in regard to his old playmate. It seemed so odd to him that this worry should come from *her*, — that she herself should form the one discordant note in the Arcadian dream that he had found so sweet; in his previous imaginings it was the presence of Mrs. Peyton which he had

dreaded; she whose propinquity now seemed so full of gentleness, reassurance, and repose. How worthy she seemed of any sacrifice he could make for her! He had seen little of her for the last two or three days, although her smile and greeting were always ready for him. Poor Clarence did not dream that she had found from certain incontestable signs and tokens, both in the young ladies and himself, that he did not require watching, and that becoming more resigned to Susy's indifference, which seemed so general and passive in quality, she was no longer tortured by the sting of jealousy.

Finding himself alone that afternoon, the young man had wandered somewhat listlessly beyond the low adobe gateway. The habits of the siesta obtained in a modified form at the rancho. After luncheon, its masters and employees usually retired, not so much from the torrid heat of the afternoon sun, but from the first harrying of the afternoon trades, whose monotonous whistle swept round the walls. A straggling passion vine near the gate beat and struggled against the wind. Clarence had stopped near it, and was gazing with worried ab-

straction across the tossing fields, when a soft voice called his name.

It was a pleasant voice, — Mrs. Peyton's. He glanced back at the gateway; it was empty. He looked quickly to the right and left; no one was there.

The voice spoke again with the musical addition of a laugh; it seemed to come from the passion vine. Ah, yes; behind it, and half overgrown by its branches, was a long, narrow embrasured opening in the wall, defended by the usual Spanish grating, and still further back, as in the frame of a picture, the half length figure of Mrs. Peyton, very handsome and striking, too, with a painted picturesqueness from the effect of the checkered light and shade.

"You looked so tired and bored out there," she said. "I am afraid you are finding it very dull at the rancho. The prospect is certainly not very enlivening from where you stand."

Clarence protested with a visible pleasure in his eyes, as he held back a spray before the opening.

"If you are not afraid of being worse bored, come in here and talk with me. You have never seen this part of the house, I

think, — my own sitting-room. You reach it from the hall in the gallery. But Lola or Anita will show you the way."

He reëntered the gateway, and quickly found the hall, — a narrow, arched passage, whose black, tunnel-like shadows were absolutely unaffected by the vivid, colorless glare of the courtyard without, seen through an opening at the end. The contrast was sharp, blinding, and distinct; even the edges of the opening were black; the outer light halted on the threshold and never penetrated within. The warm odor of verbena and dried rose leaves stole from a half-open door somewhere in the cloistered gloom. Guided by it, Clarence presently found himself on the threshold of a low-vaulted room. Two other narrow embrasured windows like the one he had just seen, and a fourth, wider latticed casement, hung with gauze curtains, suffused the apartment with a clear, yet mysterious twilight that seemed its own. The gloomy walls were warmed by bright-fringed bookshelves, topped with trifles of light feminine coloring and adornment. Low easy-chairs and a lounge, small fanciful tables, a dainty desk, gayly colored baskets of worsteds or mysterious kaleido-

scopic fragments, and vases of flowers pervaded the apartment with a mingled sense of grace and comfort. There was a womanly refinement in its careless negligence, and even the delicate wrapper of Japanese silk, gathered at the waist and falling in easy folds to the feet of the graceful mistress of this charming disorder, looked a part of its refined abandonment.

Clarence hesitated as on the threshold of some sacred shrine. But Mrs. Peyton, with her own hands, cleared a space for him on the lounge.

"You will easily suspect from all this disorder, Mr. Brant, that I spend a greater part of my time here, and that I seldom see much company. Mr. Peyton occasionally comes in long enough to stumble over a footstool or upset a vase, and I think Mary and Susy avoid it from a firm conviction that there is work concealed in these baskets. But I have my books here, and in the afternoons, behind these thick walls, one forgets the incessant stir and restlessness of the dreadful winds outside. Just now you were foolish enough to tempt them while you were nervous, or worried, or listless. Take my word for it, it 's a great

mistake. There is no more use fighting them, as I tell Mr. Peyton, than of fighting the people born under them. I have my own opinion that these winds were sent only to stir this lazy race of mongrels into activity, but they are enough to drive us Anglo-Saxons into nervous frenzy. Don't you think so? But you are young and energetic, and perhaps you are not affected by them."

She spoke pleasantly and playfully, yet with a certain nervous tension of voice and manner that seemed to illustrate her theory. At least, Clarence, in quick sympathy with her slightest emotion, was touched by it. There is no more insidious attraction in the persons we admire, than the belief that we know and understand their unhappiness, and that our admiration for them is lifted higher than a mere mutual instinctive sympathy with beauty or strength. This adorable woman had suffered. The very thought aroused his chivalry. It loosened, also, I fear, his quick, impulsive tongue.

Oh, yes; he knew it. He had lived under this whip of air and sky for three years, alone in a Spanish rancho, with only the native *peons* around him, and scarcely

speaking his own tongue even to his guardian. He spent his mornings on horseback in fields like these, until the *vientos generales*, as they called them, sprang up and drove him nearly frantic; and his only relief was to bury himself among the books in his guardian's library, and shut out the world, — just as she did. The smile which hovered around the lady's mouth at that moment arrested Clarence, with a quick remembrance of their former relative positions, and a sudden conviction of his familiarity in suggesting an equality of experience, and he blushed. But Mrs. Peyton diverted his embarrassment with an air of interested absorption in his story, and said: —

"Then you know these people thoroughly, Mr. Brant? I am afraid that *we* do not."

Clarence had already gathered that fact within the last few days, and, with his usual impulsive directness, said so. A slight knitting of Mrs. Peyton's brows passed off, however, as he quickly and earnestly went on to say that it was impossible for the Peytons in their present relations to the natives to judge them, or to be judged by them fairly. How they were a childlike

race, credulous and trustful, but, like all credulous and trustful people, given to retaliate when imposed upon with a larger insincerity, exaggeration, and treachery. How they had seen their houses and lands occupied by strangers, their religion scorned, their customs derided, their patriarchal society invaded by hollow civilization or frontier brutality — all this fortified by incident and illustration, the outcome of some youthful experience, and given with the glowing enthusiasm of conviction. Mrs. Peyton listened with the usual divided feminine interest between subject and speaker.

Where did this rough, sullen boy — as she had known him — pick up this delicate and swift perception, this reflective judgment, and this odd felicity of expression? It was not possible that it was in him while he was the companion of her husband's servants or the recognized "chum" of the scamp Hooker. No. But if *he* could have changed like this, why not Susy? Mrs. Peyton, in the conservatism of her sex, had never been quite free from fears of her adopted daughter's hereditary instincts; but, with this example before her, she now

took heart. Perhaps the change was coming slowly; perhaps even now what she thought was indifference and coldness was only some abnormal preparation or condition. But she only smiled and said: —

"Then, if you think those people have been wronged, you are not on our side, Mr. Brant?"

What to an older and more worldly man would have seemed, and probably was, only a playful reproach, struck Clarence deeply, and brought his pent-up feelings to his lips.

"*You* have never wronged them. You could n't do it; it is n't in your nature. I am on *your* side, and for you and yours always, Mrs. Peyton. From the first time I saw you on the plains, when I was brought, a ragged boy, before you by your husband, I think I would gladly have laid down my life for you. I don't mind telling you now that I was even jealous of poor Susy, so anxious was I for the smallest share in your thoughts, if only for a moment. You could have done anything with me you wished, and I should have been happy, — far happier than I have been ever since. I tell you this, Mrs. Peyton, now, because you have just doubted if I might be 'on your side,'

but I have been longing to tell it all to you before, and it is that I am ready to do anything you want, — all you want, — to be on *your side* and *at your side*, now and forever."

He was so earnest and hearty, and above all so appallingly and blissfully happy, in this relief of his feelings, smiling as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and so absurdly unconscious of his twenty-two years, his little brown curling mustache, the fire in his wistful, yearning eyes, and, above all, of his clasped hands and lover-like attitude, that Mrs. Peyton — at first rigid as stone, then suffused to the eyes — cast a hasty glance round the apartment, put her handkerchief to her face, and laughed like a girl.

At which Clarence, by no means discomposed, but rather accepting her emotion as perfectly natural, joined her heartily, and added: —

"It 's so, Mrs. Peyton; I 'm glad I told you. You don't mind it, do you?"

But Mrs. Peyton had resumed her gravity, and perhaps a touch of her previous misgivings.

"I should certainly be very sorry," she

said, looking at him critically, "to object to your sharing your old friendship for your little playmate with her parents and guardians, or to your expressing it to *them* as frankly as to her."

She saw the quick change in his mobile face and the momentary arrest of its happy expression. She was frightened and yet puzzled. It was not the sensitiveness of a lover at the mention of the loved one's name, and yet it suggested an uneasy consciousness. If his previous impulsive outburst had been prompted honestly, or even artfully, by his passion for Susy, why had he looked so shocked when she spoke of her?

But Clarence, whose emotion had been caused by the sudden recall of his knowledge of Susy's own disloyalty to the woman whose searching eyes were upon him, in his revulsion against the deceit was, for an instant, upon the point of divulging all. Perhaps, if Mrs. Peyton had shown more confidence, he would have done so, and materially altered the evolution of this story. But, happily, it is upon these slight human weaknesses that your romancer depends, and Clarence, with no other reason than the instinctive sympathy of youth with youth in

its opposition to wisdom and experience, let the opportunity pass, and took the responsibility of it out of the hands of this chronicler.

Howbeit, to cover his confusion, he seized upon the second idea that was in his mind, and stammered, "Susy! Yes, I wanted to speak to you about her." Mrs. Peyton held her breath, but the young man went on, although hesitatingly, with evident sincerity. "Have you heard from any of her relations since — since — you adopted her?"

It seemed a natural enough question, although not the *sequitur* she had expected. "No," she said carelessly. "It was well understood, after the nearest relation — an aunt by marriage — had signed her consent to Susy's adoption, that there should be no further intercourse with the family. There seemed to us no necessity for reopening the past, and Susy herself expressed no desire." She stopped, and again fixing her handsome eyes on Clarence, said, "Do you know any of them?"

But Clarence by this time had recovered himself, and was able to answer carelessly and truthfully that he did not. Mrs. Peyton, still regarding him closely, added some-

what deliberately, "It matters little now what relations she has; Mr. Peyton and I have complete legal control over her until she is of age, and we can easily protect her from any folly of her own or others, or from any of the foolish fancies that sometimes overtake girls of her age and inexperience."

To her utter surprise, however, Clarence uttered a faint sigh of relief, and his face again recovered its expression of boyish happiness. "I 'm glad of it, Mrs. Peyton," he said heartily. "No one could understand better what is for her interest in all things than yourself. Not," he said, with hasty and equally hearty loyalty to his old playmate, "that I think she would ever go against your wishes, or do anything that she knows to be wrong, but she is very young and innocent, — as much of a child as ever, don't you think so, Mrs. Peyton?"

It was amusing, yet nevertheless puzzling, to hear this boyish young man comment upon Susy's girlishness. And Clarence was serious, for he had quite forgotten in Mrs. Peyton's presence the impression of superiority which Susy had lately made upon him. But Mrs. Peyton returned to the charge, or, rather, to an attack upon what

she conceived to be Clarence's old position.

"I suppose she does seem girlish compared to Mary Rogers, who is a much more reserved and quiet nature. But Mary is very charming, Mr. Brant, and I am really delighted to have her here with Susy. She has such lovely dark eyes and such good manners. She has been well brought up, and it is easy to see that her friends are superior people. I must write to them to thank them for her visit, and beg them to let her stay longer. I think you said you did n't know them?"

But Clarence, whose eyes had been thoughtfully and admiringly wandering over every characteristic detail of the charming apartment, here raised them to its handsome mistress, with an apologetic air and a "No" of such unaffected and complete abstraction, that she was again dumbfounded. Certainly, it could not be Mary in whom he was interested.

Abandoning any further inquisition for the present, she let the talk naturally fall upon the books scattered about the tables. The young man knew them all far better than she did, with a cognate knowledge of

others of which she had never heard. She found herself in the attitude of receiving information from this boy, whose boyishness, however, seemed to have evaporated, whose tone had changed with the subject, and who now spoke with the conscious reserve of knowledge. Decidedly, she must have grown rusty in her seclusion. This came, she thought bitterly, of living alone; of her husband's preoccupation with the property; of Susy's frivolous caprices. At the end of eight years to be outstripped by a former cattle-boy of her husband's, and to have her French corrected in a matter of fact way by this recent pupil of the priests, was really too bad! Perhaps he even looked down upon Susy! She smiled dangerously but suavely.

"You must have worked *so* hard to educate yourself from nothing, Mr. Brant. You could n't read, I think, when you first came to us. No? Could you really? I know it has been very difficult for Susy to get on with her studies in proportion. We had so much to first eradicate in the way of manners, style, and habits of thought which the poor child had picked up from her companions, and for which *she* was not respon-

sible. Of course, with a boy that does not signify," she added, with feline gentleness.

But the barbed speech glanced from the young man's smoothly smiling abstraction.

"Ah, yes. But those were happy days, Mrs. Peyton," he answered, with an exasperating return of his previous boyish enthusiasm, "perhaps because of our ignorance. I don't think that Susy and I are any happier for knowing that the plains are not as flat as we believed they were, and that the sun does n't have to burn a hole in them every night when it sets. But I know I believed that *you* knew everything. When I once saw you smiling over a book in your hand, I thought it must be a different one from any that I had ever seen, and perhaps made expressly for you. I can see you there still. Do you know," quite confidentially, "that you reminded me — of course *you* were much younger — of what I remembered of my mother?"

But Mrs. Peyton's reply of "Ah, indeed," albeit polite, indicated some coldness and lack of animation. Clarence rose quickly, but cast a long and lingering look around him.

"You will come again, Mr. Brant," said

the lady more graciously. "If you are going to ride now, perhaps you would try to meet Mr. Peyton. He is late already, and I am always uneasy when he is out alone, — particularly on one of those half-broken horses, which they consider good enough for riding here. *You* have ridden them before and understand them, but I am afraid that 's another thing *we* have got to learn."

When the young man found himself again confronting the glittering light of the courtyard, he remembered the interview and the soft twilight of the boudoir only as part of a pleasant dream. There was a rude awakening in the fierce wind, which had increased with the lengthening shadows. It seemed to sweep away the half-sensuous comfort that had pervaded him, and made him coldly realize that he had done nothing to solve the difficulties of his relations to Susy. He had lost the one chance of confiding to Mrs. Peyton, — if he had ever really intended to do so. It was impossible for him to do it hereafter without a confession of prolonged deceit.

He reached the stables impatiently, where his attention was attracted by the sound of excited voices in the corral. Looking

within, he was concerned to see that one of the vacqueros was holding the dragging bridle of a blown, dusty, and foam-covered horse, around whom a dozen idlers were gathered. Even beneath its coating of dust and foam and the half-displaced saddle blanket, Clarence immediately recognized the spirited *pinto* mustang which Peyton had ridden that morning.

"What 's the matter?" said Clarence, from the gateway.

The men fell apart, glancing at each other. One said quickly in Spanish: —

"Say nothing to *him*. It is an affair of the house."

But this brought Clarence down like a bombshell among them, not to be overlooked in his equal command of their tongue and of them. "Ah! come, now. What drunken piggishness is this? Speak!"

"The *padron* has been — perhaps — thrown," stammered the first speaker. "His horse arrives, — but he does not. We go to inform the señora."

"No, you don't! mules and imbeciles! Do you want to frighten her to death? Mount, every one of you, and follow me!"

The men hesitated, but for only a moment. Clarence had a fine assortment of

Spanish epithets, expletives, and objurgations, gathered in his *rodeo* experience at El Refugio, and laid them about him with such fervor and discrimination that two or three mules, presumably with guilty consciences, mistaking their direction, actually cowered against the stockade of the corral in fear. In another moment the vacqueros had hastily mounted, and, with Clarence at their head, were dashing down the road towards Santa Inez. Here he spread them in open order in the grain, on either side of the track, himself taking the road.

They did not proceed very far. For when they had reached the gradual slope which marked the decline to the second terrace, Clarence, obeying an instinct as irresistible as it was unaccountable, which for the last few moments had been forcing itself upon him, ordered a halt. The *casa* and corral had already sunk in the plain behind them; it was the spot where the lasso had been thrown at him a few evenings before! Bidding the men converge slowly towards the road, he went on more cautiously, with his eyes upon the track before him. Presently he stopped. There was a ragged displacement of the cracked and

crumbling soil and the unmistakable scoop of kicking hoofs. As he stooped to examine them, one of the men at the right uttered a shout. By the same strange instinct Clarence knew that Peyton was found!

He was, indeed, lying there among the wild oats at the right of the road, but without trace of life or scarcely human appearance. His clothes, where not torn and shredded away, were partly turned inside out; his shoulders, neck, and head were a shapeless, undistinguishable mask of dried earth and rags, like a mummy wrapping. His left boot was gone. His large frame seemed boneless, and, except for the cerements of his mud-stiffened clothing, was limp and sodden.

Clarence raised his head suddenly from a quick examination of the body, and looked at the men around him. One of them was already cantering away. Clarence instantly threw himself on his horse, and, putting spurs to the animal, drew a revolver from his holster and fired over the man's head. The rider turned in his saddle, saw his pursuer, and pulled up.

"Go back," said Clarence, "or my next shot won't *miss* you."

"I was only going to inform the señora," said the man with a shrug and a forced smile.

"*I* will do that," said Clarence grimly, driving him back with him into the waiting circle; then turning to them he said slowly, with deliberate, smileless irony, "And now, my brave gentlemen, — knights of the bull and gallant mustang hunters, — *I* want to inform *you* that I believe that Mr. Peyton was *murdered*, and if the man who killed him is anywhere this side of hell, *I* intend to find him. Good! You understand me! Now lift up the body, — you two, by the shoulders; you two, by the feet. Let your horses follow. For I intend that you four shall carry home your master in your arms, on foot. Now forward to the corral by the back trail. Disobey me, or step out of line and" — He raised the revolver ominously.

If the change wrought in the dead man before them was weird and terrifying, no less distinct and ominous was the change that, during the last few minutes, had come over the living speaker. For it was no longer the youthful Clarence who sat there, but a haggard, prematurely worn, desperate-looking avenger, lank of cheek, and injected

of eye, whose white teeth glistened under the brown mustache and thin pale lips that parted when his restrained breath now and then hurriedly escaped them.

As the procession moved on, two men slunk behind with the horses.

"Mother of God! Who is this wolf's whelp?" said Manuel.

"Hush!" said his companion in a terrified whisper. "Have you not heard? It is the son of Hamilton Brant, the assassin, the duelist, — he who was fusiladed in Sonora." He made the sign of the cross quickly. "Jesus Maria! Let them look out who have cause, for the blood of his father is in him!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT other speech passed between Clarence and Peyton's retainers was not known, but not a word of the interview seemed to have been divulged by those present. It was generally believed and accepted that Judge Peyton met his death by being thrown from his half-broken mustang, and dragged at its heels, and medical opinion, hastily summoned from Santa Inez after the body had been borne to the corral, and stripped of its hideous encasings, declared that the neck had been broken, and death had followed instantaneously. An inquest was deemed unnecessary.

Clarence had selected Mary to break the news to Mrs. Peyton, and the frightened young girl was too much struck with the change still visible in his face, and the half authority of his manner, to decline, or even to fully appreciate the calamity that had befallen them. After the first benumbing shock, Mrs. Peyton passed into that strange

exaltation of excitement brought on by the immediate necessity for action, followed by a pallid calm, which the average spectator too often unfairly accepts as incongruous, inadequate, or artificial. There had also occurred one of those strange compensations that wait on Death or disrupture by catastrophe: such as the rude shaking down of an unsettled life, the forcible realization of what were vague speculations, the breaking of old habits and traditions, and the unloosing of half-conscious bonds. Mrs. Peyton, without insensibility to her loss or disloyalty to her affections, nevertheless felt a relief to know that she was now really Susy's guardian, free to order her new life wherever and under what conditions she chose as most favorable to it, and that she could dispose of this house that was wearying to her when Susy was away, and which the girl herself had always found insupportable. She could settle this question of Clarence's relations to her daughter out of hand without advice or opposition. She had a brother in the East, who would be summoned to take care of the property. This consideration for the living pursued her, even while the dead man's presence still awed

the hushed house; it was in her thoughts as she stood beside his bier and adjusted the flowers on his breast, which no longer moved for or against these vanities; and it stayed with her even in the solitude of her darkened room.

But if Mrs. Peyton was deficient, it was Susy who filled the popular idea of a mourner, and whose emotional attitude of a grief-stricken daughter left nothing to be desired. It was she who, when the house was filled with sympathizing friends from San Francisco and the few near neighbors who had hurried with condolences, was overflowing in her reminiscences of the dead man's goodness to her, and her own undying affection; who recalled ominous things that he had said, and strange premonitions of her own, the result of her ever-present filial anxiety; it was she who had hurried home that afternoon, impelled with vague fears of some impending calamity; it was she who drew a picture of Peyton as a doting and almost too indulgent parent, which Mary Rogers failed to recognize, and which brought back vividly to Clarence's recollection her own childish exaggerations of the Indian massacre. I am far from saying

that she was entirely insincere or merely acting at these moments; at times she was taken with a mild hysteria, brought on by the exciting intrusion of this real event in her monotonous life, by the attentions of her friends, the importance of her suffering as an only child, and the advancement of her position as the heiress of the Robles Rancho. If her tears were near the surface, they were at least genuine, and filmed her violet eyes and reddened her pretty eyelids quite as effectually as if they had welled from the depths of her being. Her black frock lent a matured dignity to her figure, and paled her delicate complexion with the refinement of suffering. Even Clarence was moved in that dark and haggard abstraction that had settled upon him since his strange outbreak over the body of his old friend.

The extent of that change had not been noticed by Mrs. Peyton, who had only observed that Clarence had treated her grief with a grave and silent respect. She was grateful for that. A repetition of his boyish impulsiveness would have been distasteful to her at such a moment. She only thought him more mature and more sub-

dued, and as the only man now in her household his services had been invaluable in the emergency.

The funeral had taken place at Santa Inez, where half the county gathered to pay their last respects to their former fellow-citizen and neighbor, whose legal and combative victories they had admired, and whom death had lifted into a public character. The family were returning to the house the same afternoon, Mrs. Peyton and the girls in one carriage, the female house-servants in another, and Clarence on horseback. They had reached the first plateau, and Clarence was riding a little in advance, when an extraordinary figure, rising from the grain beyond, began to gesticulate to him wildly. Checking the driver of the first carriage, Clarence bore down upon the stranger. To his amazement it was Jim Hooker. Mounted on a peaceful, unwieldy plough horse, he was nevertheless accoutred and armed after his most extravagant fashion. In addition to a heavy rifle across his saddle-bow he was weighted down with a knife and revolvers. Clarence was in no mood for trifling, and almost rudely demanded his business.

"Gord, Clarence, it ain't foolin'. The Sisters' title was decided yesterday."

"I knew it, you fool! It 's *your* title! You were already on your land and in possession. What the devil are you doing *here?*"

"Yes, — but," stammered Jim, "all the boys holding that title moved up here to 'make the division' and grab all they could. And I followed. And I found out that they were going to grab Judge Peyton's house, because it was on the line, if they could, and findin' you was all away, by Gord *they did!* and they 're in it! And I stoled out and rode down here to warn ye."

He stopped, looked at Clarence, glanced darkly around him and then down on his accoutrements. Even in that supreme moment of sincerity, he could not resist the possibilities of the situation.

"It 's as much as my life 's worth," he said gloomily. "But," with a dark glance at his weapons, "I 'll sell it dearly."

"Jim!" said Clarence, in a terrible voice, "you 're not lying again?"

"No," said Jim hurriedly. "I swear it, Clarence! No! Honest Injin this time. And look. I 'll help you. They ain't ex-

pectin' you yet, and they think ye 'll come by the road. Ef I raised a scare off there by the corral, while you 're creepin' *round by the back*, mebbe you could get in while they 're all lookin' for ye in front, don't you see? I 'll raise a big row, and they need n't know but what ye 've got wind of it and brought a party with you from Santa Inez."

In a flash Clarence had wrought a feasible plan out of Jim's fantasy.

"Good," he said, wringing his old companion's hand. "Go back quietly now; hang round the corral, and when you see the carriage climbing the last terrace raise your alarm. Don't mind how loud it is, there 'll be nobody but the servants in the carriages."

He rode quickly back to the first carriage, at whose window Mrs. Peyton's calm face was already questioning him. He told her briefly and concisely of the attack, and what he proposed to do.

"You have shown yourself so strong in matters of worse moment than this," he added quietly, "that I have no fears for your courage. I have only to ask you to trust yourself to me, to put you back at once

in your own home. Your presence there, just now, is the one important thing, whatever happens afterwards."

She recognized his maturer tone and determined manner, and nodded assent. More than that, a faint fire came into her handsome eyes; the two girls kindled their own at that flaming beacon, and sat with flushed cheeks and suspended, indignant breath. They were Western Americans, and not over much used to imposition.

"You must get down before we raise the hill, and follow me on foot through the grain. I was thinking," he added, turning to Mrs. Peyton, "of your boudoir window."

She had been thinking of it, too, and nodded.

"The vine has loosened the bars," he said.

"If it has n't, we must squeeze through them," she returned simply.

At the end of the terrace Clarence dismounted, and helped them from the carriage. He then gave directions to the coachmen to follow the road slowly to the corral in front of the *casa*, and tied his horse behind the second carriage. Then, with Mrs. Peyton and the two young girls, he plunged into the grain.

It was hot, it was dusty, their thin shoes slipped in the crumbling adobe, and the great blades caught in their crape draperies, but they uttered no complaint. Whatever ulterior thought was in their minds, they were bent only on one thing at that moment, — on entering the house at any hazard. Mrs. Peyton had lived long enough on the frontier to know the magic power of *possession*. Susy already was old enough to feel the acute feminine horror of the profanation of her own belongings by alien hands. Clarence, more cognizant of the whole truth than the others, was equally silent and determined; and Mary Rogers was fired with the zeal of loyalty.

Suddenly a series of blood-curdling yells broke from the direction of the corral, and they stopped. But Clarence at once recognized the well-known war-whoop imitation of Jim Hooker, — infinitely more gruesome and appalling than the genuine aboriginal challenge. A half dozen shots fired in quick succession had evidently the same friendly origin.

"Now is our time," said Clarence eagerly. "We must run for the house."

They had fortunately reached by this time

the angle of the adobe wall of the *casa*, and the long afternoon shadows of the building were in their favor. They pressed forward eagerly with the sounds of Jim Hooker's sham encounter still in their ears, mingled with answering shouts of defiance from strange voices within the building towards the front.

They rapidly skirted the wall, even passing boldly before the back gateway, which seemed empty and deserted, and the next moment stood beside the narrow window of the boudoir. Clarence's surmises were correct; the iron grating was not only loose, but yielded to a vigorous wrench, the vine itself acting as a lever to pull out the rusty bars. The young man held out his hand, but Mrs. Peyton, with the sudden agility of a young girl, leaped into the window, followed by Mary and Susy. The inner casement yielded to her touch; the next moment they were within the room. Then Mrs. Peyton's flushed and triumphant face reappeared at the window.

"It 's all right; the men are all in the courtyard, or in the front of the house. The boudoir door is strong, and we can bolt them out."

"It won't be necessary," said Clarence quietly; "you will not be disturbed."

"But are you not coming in?" she asked timidly, holding the window open.

Clarence looked at her with his first faint smile since Peyton's death.

"Of course I am, but not in *that* way. I am going in by *the front gate.*"

She would have detained him, but, with a quick wave of his hand, he left her, and ran swiftly around the wall of the *casa* toward the front. The gate was half open; a dozen excited men were gathered before it and in the archway, and among them, whitened with dust, blackened with powder, and apparently glutted with rapine, and still holding a revolver in his hand, was Jim Hooker! As Clarence approached, the men quickly retreated inside the gate and closed it, but not before he had exchanged a meaning glance with Jim. When he reached the gate, a man from within roughly demanded his business.

"I wish to see the leader of this party," said Clarence quietly.

"I reckon you do," returned the man, with a short laugh. "But I kalkilate *he* don't return the compliment."

"He probably will when he reads this note to his employer," continued Clarence still coolly, selecting a paper from his pocket-book. It was addressed to Francisco Robles, Superintendent of the Sisters' Title, and directed him to give Mr. Clarence Brant free access to the property and the fullest information concerning it. The man took it, glanced at it, looked again at Clarence, and then passed the paper to a third man among the group in the courtyard. The latter read it, and approached the gate carelessly.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I am afraid you have the advantage of me in being able to transact business through bars," said Clarence, with slow but malevolent distinctness, "and as mine is important, I think you had better open the gate to me."

The slight laugh that his speech had evoked from the bystanders was checked as the leader retorted angrily: —

"That 's all very well; but how do I know that you 're the man represented in that letter? Pancho Robles may know you, but *I* don't."

"That you can find out very easily," said

Clarence. "There is a man among your party who knows me, — Mr. Hooker. Ask him."

The man turned, with a quick mingling of surprise and suspicion, to the gloomy, imperturbable Hooker. Clarence could not hear the reply of that young gentleman, but it was evidently not wanting in his usual dark, enigmatical exaggeration. The man surlily opened the gate.

"All the same," he said, still glancing suspiciously at Hooker, "I don't see what *he's* got to do with you."

"A great deal," said Clarence, entering the courtyard, and stepping into the veranda; "*he's one of my tenants.*"

"Your *what?*" said the man, with a coarse laugh of incredulity.

"My tenants," repeated Clarence, glancing around the courtyard carelessly. Nevertheless, he was relieved to notice that the three or four Mexicans of the party did not seem to be old retainers of the rancho. There was no evidence of the internal treachery he had feared.

"Your *tenants!*" echoed the man, with an uneasy glance at the faces of the others.

"Yes," said Clarence, with business brev-

ity; "and, for the matter of that, although I have no reason to be particularly proud of it, *so are you all*. You ask my business here. It seems to be the same as yours, — to hold possession of this house! With this difference, however," he continued, taking a document from his pocket. "Here is the certificate, signed by the County Clerk, of the bill of sale of the entire Sisters' title to *me*. It includes the whole two leagues from Fair Plains to the old boundary line of this rancho, which you forcibly entered this morning. There is the document; examine it if you like. The only shadow of a claim you could have to this property you would have to derive from *me*. The only excuse you could have for this act of lawlessness would be orders from *me*. And all that you have done this morning is only the assertion of *my* legal right to this house. If I disavow your act, as I might, I leave you as helpless as any tramp that was ever kicked from a doorstep, — as any burglar that was ever collared on the fence by a constable."

It was the truth. There was no denying the authority of the document, the facts of the situation, or its ultimate power and sig-

nificance. There was consternation, stupefaction, and even a half-humorous recognition of the absurdity of their position on most of the faces around him. Incongruous as the scene was, it was made still more grotesque by the attitude of Jim Hooker. Ruthlessly abandoning the party of convicted trespassers, he stalked gloomily over to the side of Clarence, with the air of having been all the time scornfully in the secret and a mien of wearied victoriousness, and thus halting, he disdainfully expectorated tobacco juice on the ground between him and his late companions, as if to form a line of demarcation. The few Mexicans began to edge towards the gateway. This defection of his followers recalled the leader, who was no coward, to himself again.

"Shut the gate, there!" he shouted.

As its two sides clashed together again, he turned deliberately to Clarence.

"That 's all very well, young man, as regards the *title*. You may have *bought* up the land, and legally own every square inch of howling wilderness between this and San Francisco, and I wish you joy of your d——d fool's bargain; you may have got a whole circus like that," pointing to the gloomy

Jim, "at your back. But with all your money and all your friends you 've forgotten one thing. You have n't got possession, and we have."

"That 's just where we differ," said Clarence coolly, "for if you take the trouble to examine the house, you will see that it is already in possession of Mrs. Peyton, — *my tenant.*"

He paused to give effect to his revelations. But he was, nevertheless, unprepared for an unrehearsed dramatic situation. Mrs. Peyton, who had been tired of waiting, and was listening in the passage, at the mention of her name, entered the gallery, followed by the young ladies. The slight look of surprise upon her face at the revelation she had just heard of Clarence's ownership, only gave the suggestion of her having been unexpectedly disturbed in her peaceful seclusion. One of the Mexicans turned pale, with a frightened glance at the passage, as if he expected the figure of the dead man to follow.

The group fell back. The game was over, — and lost. No one recognized it more quickly than the gamblers themselves. More than that, desperate and lawless as

they were, they still retained the chivalry of Western men, and every hat was slowly doffed to the three black figures that stood silently in the gallery. And even apologetic speech began to loosen the clenched teeth of the discomfited leader.

"We — were — told there was no one in the house," he stammered.

"And it was the truth," said a pert, youthful, yet slightly affected voice. "For we climbed into the window just as you came in at the gate."

It was Susy's words that stung their ears again; but it was Susy's pretty figure, suddenly advanced and in a slightly theatrical attitude, that checked their anger. There had been a sudden ominous silence, as the whole plot of rescue seemed to be revealed to them in those audacious words. But a sense of the ludicrous, which too often was the only perception that ever mitigated the passions of such assemblies, here suddenly asserted itself. The leader burst into a loud laugh, which was echoed by the others, and, with waving hats, the whole party swept peacefully out through the gate.

"But what does all this mean about *your* purchasing the land, Mr. Brant?" said Mrs.

Peyton quickly, fixing her eyes intently on Clarence.

A faint color — the useless protest of his truthful blood — came to his cheek.

"The house is *yours*, and yours alone, Mrs. Peyton. The purchase of the sisters' title was a private arrangement between Mr. Peyton and myself, in view of an emergency like this."

She did not, however, take her proud, searching eyes from his face, and he was forced to turn away.

"It was *so* like dear, good, thoughtful papa," said Susy. "Why, bless me," in a lower voice, "if that is n't that lying old Jim Hooker standing there by the gate!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JUDGE PEYTON had bequeathed his entire property unconditionally to his wife. But his affairs were found to be greatly in disorder, and his papers in confusion, and although Mrs. Peyton could discover no actual record of the late transaction with Mr. Brant, which had saved her the possession of the homestead, it was evident that he had spent large sums in speculative attempts to maintain the integrity of his estate. That enormous domain, although perfectly unencumbered, had been nevertheless unremunerative, partly through the costs of litigation and partly through the systematic depredations to which its great size and long line of unprotected boundary had subjected it. It had been invaded by squatters and "jumpers," who had sown and reaped crops without discovery; its cattle and wild horses had strayed or been driven beyond its ill-defined and hopeless limits. Against these difficulties the widow felt herself unable and un-

willing to contend, and with the advice of her friends and her lawyer, she concluded to sell the estate, except that portion covered by the Sisters' title, which, with the homestead, had been reconveyed to her by Clarence. She retired with Susy to the house in San Francisco, leaving Clarence to occupy and hold the *casa*, with her servants, for her until order was restored. The Robles Rancho thus became the headquarters of the new owner of the Sisters' title, from which he administered its affairs, visited its incumbencies, overlooked and surveyed its lands, and — occasionally — collected its rents. There were not wanting critics who averred that these were scarcely remunerative, and that the young San Francisco fine gentleman, who was only Hamilton Brant's son, after all, yet who wished to ape the dignity and degree of a large landholder, had made a very foolish bargain. I grieve to say that one of his own tenants, namely, Jim Hooker, in his secret heart inclined to that belief, and looked upon Clarence's speculation as an act of far-seeing and inordinate vanity.

Indeed, the belligerent Jim had partly — and of course darkly — intimated some-

thing of this to Susy in their brief reunion at the *casa* during the few days that followed its successful reoccupation. And Clarence, remembering her older caprices, and her remark on her first recognition of him, was quite surprised at the easy familiarity of her reception of this forgotten companion of their childhood. But he was still more concerned in noticing, for the first time, a singular sympathetic understanding of each other, and an odd similarity of occasional action and expression between them. It was a part of this monstrous peculiarity that neither the sympathy nor the likeness suggested any particular friendship or amity in the pair, but rather a mutual antagonism and suspicion. Mrs. Peyton, coldly polite to Clarence's former *companion*, but condescendingly gracious to his present *tenant* and retainer, did not notice it, preoccupied with the annoyance and pain of Susy's frequent references to the old days of their democratic equality.

"You don't remember, Jim, the time that you painted my face in the wagon, and got me up as an Indian papoose?" she said mischievously.

But Jim, who had no desire to recall his

previous humble position before Mrs. Peyton or Clarence, was only vaguely responsive. Clarence, although joyfully touched at this seeming evidence of Susy's loyalty to the past, nevertheless found himself even more acutely pained at the distress it caused Mrs. Peyton, and was as relieved as she was by Hooker's reticence. For he had seen little of Susy since Peyton's death, and there had been no repetition of their secret interviews. Neither had he, nor she as far as he could judge, noticed the omission. He had been more than usually kind, gentle, and protecting in his manner towards her, with little reference, however, to any response from her, yet he was vaguely conscious of some change in his feelings. He attributed it, when he thought of it at all, to the exciting experiences through which he had passed; to some sentiment of responsibility to his dead friend; and to another secret preoccupation that was always in his mind. He believed it would pass in time. Yet he felt a certain satisfaction that she was no longer able to trouble him, except, of course, when she pained Mrs. Peyton, and then he was half conscious of taking the old attitude of the dead husband in

mediating between them. Yet so great was his inexperience that he believed, with pathetic simplicity of perception, that all this was due to the slow maturing of his love for her, and that he was still able to make her happy. But this was something to be thought of later. Just now Providence seemed to have offered him a vocation and a purpose that his idle adolescence had never known. He did not dream that his capacity for patience was only the slow wasting of his love.

Meantime that more wonderful change and recreation of the Californian landscape, so familiar, yet always so young, had come to the rancho. The league-long terrace that had yellowed, whitened, and wasted for half a year beneath a staring, monotonous sky, now under sailing clouds, flying and broken shafts of light, and sharply defined lines of rain, had taken a faint hue of resurrection. The dust that had muffled the roads and byways, and choked the low oaks that fringed the sunken *cañada*, had long since been laid. The warm, moist breath of the southwest trades had softened the hard, dry lines of the landscape, and restored its color as of a picture over which a damp sponge had

been passed. The broad expanse of plateau before the *casa* glistened and grew dark. The hidden woods of the *cañada*, cleared and strengthened in their solitude, dripped along the trails and hollows that were now transformed into running streams. The distinguishing *madroño* near the entrance to the rancho had changed its crimson summer suit and masqueraded in buff and green.

Yet there were leaden days, when half the prospect seemed to be seen through palisades of rain; when the slight incline between the terraces became a tumultuous cascade, and the surest hoofs slipped on trails of unctuous mud; when cattle were bogged a few yards from the highway, and the crossing of the turnpike road was a dangerous ford. There were days of gale and tempest, when the shriveled stalks of giant oats were stricken like trees, and lay across each other in rigid angles, and a roar as of the sea came up from the writhing treetops in the sunken valley. There were long weary nights of steady downpour, hammering on the red tiles of the *casa*, and drumming on the shingles of the new veranda, which was more terrible to be borne. Alone, but for the ser-

vants, and an occasional storm-stayed tenant from Fair Plains, Clarence might have, at such times, questioned the effect of this seclusion upon his impassioned nature. But he had already been accustomed to monastic seclusion in his boyish life at El Refugio, and he did not reflect that, for that very reason, its indulgences might have been dangerous. From time to time letters reached him from the outer world of San Francisco, — a few pleasant lines from Mrs. Peyton, in answer to his own chronicle of his half stewardship, giving the news of the family, and briefly recounting their movements. She was afraid that Susy's sensitive nature chafed under the restriction of mourning in the gay city, but she trusted to bring her back for a change to Robles when the rains were over. This was a poor substitute for those brief, happy glimpses of the home circle which had so charmed him, but he accepted it stoically. He wandered over the old house, from which the perfume of domesticity seemed to have evaporated, yet, notwithstanding Mrs. Peyton's playful permission, he never intruded upon the sanctity of the boudoir, and kept it jealously locked.

He was sitting in Peyton's business room

one morning, when Incarnacion entered. Clarence had taken a fancy to this Indian, half steward, half vacquero, who had reciprocated it with a certain dog-like fidelity, but also a feline indirectness that was part of his nature. He had been early prepossessed with Clarence through a kinsman at El Refugio, where the young American's generosity had left a romantic record among the common people. He had been pleased to approve of his follies before the knowledge of his profitless and lordly land purchase had commended itself to him as corroborative testimony. "Of true hidalgo blood, mark you," he had said oracularly. "Wherefore was his father sacrificed by mongrels! As to the others, believe me, — bah!"

He stood there, sombrero in hand, murky and confidential, steaming through his soaked *serape* and exhaling a blended odor of equine perspiration and cigarette smoke.

"It was, perhaps, as the master had noticed, a brigand's own day! Bullying, treacherous, and wicked! It blew you off your horse if you so much as lifted your arms and let the wind get inside your *serape;* and as for the mud, — caramba! in fifty

varas your forelegs were like bears, and your hoofs were earthen plasters!"

Clarence knew that Incarnacion had not sought him with mere meteorological information, and patiently awaited further developments. The vacquero went on:—

"But one of the things this beast of a weather did was to wash down the stalks of the grain, and to clear out the trough and hollows between, and to make level the fields, and — look you! to uncover the stones and rubbish and whatever the summer dust had buried. Indeed, it was even as a miracle that José Mendez one day, after the first showers, came upon a silver button from his *calzas*, which he had lost in the early summer. And it was only that morning that, remembering how much and with what fire Don Clarencio had sought the missing boot from the foot of the Señor Peyton when his body was found, he, Incarnacion, had thought he would look for it on the *falda* of the second terrace. And behold, Mother of God! it was there! Soaked with mud and rain, but the same as when the señor was alive. To the very spur!"

He drew the boot from beneath his *serape* and laid it before Clarence. The young

man instantly recognized it, in spite of its weather-beaten condition and its air of grotesque and drunken inconsistency to the usually trim and correct appearance of Peyton when alive. "It is the same," he said, in a low voice.

"Good!" said Incarnacion. "Now, if Don Clarencio will examine the American spur, he will see — what? A few horse-hairs twisted and caught in the sharp points of the rowel. Good! Is it the hair of the horse that Señor rode? Clearly not; and in truth not. It is too long for the flanks and belly of the horse; it is not the same color as the tail and the mane. How comes it there? It comes from the twisted horse-hair rope of a *riata*, and not from the braided cowhide thongs of the regular lasso of a vacquero. The lasso slips not much, but holds; the *riata* slips much and strangles."

"But Mr. Peyton was not strangled," said Clarence quickly.

"No, for the noose of the *riata* was perhaps large, — who knows? It might have slipped down his arms, pinioned him, and pulled him off. Truly! — such has been known before. Then on the ground it

slipped again, or he perhaps worked it off to his feet where it caught on his spur, and then he was dragged until the boot came off, and behold! he was dead."

This had been Clarence's own theory of the murder, but he had only half confided it to Incarnacion. He silently examined the spur with the accusing horse-hair, and placed it in his desk. Incarnacion continued: —

"There is not a vacquero in the whole rancho who has a horse-hair *riata*. We use the braided cowhide; it is heavier and stronger; it is for the bull and not the man. The horse-hair *riata* comes from over the range — south."

There was a dead silence, broken only by the drumming of the rain upon the roof of the veranda. Incarnacion slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Don Clarencio does not know the southern county? Francisco Robles, cousin of the 'Sisters,' — he they call 'Pancho,' — comes from the south. Surely when Don Clarencio bought the title he saw Francisco, for he was the steward?"

"I dealt only with the actual owners and through my bankers in San Francisco," returned Clarence abstractedly.

Incarnacion looked through the yellow corners of his murky eyes at his master.

"Pedro Valdez, who was sent away by Señor Peyton, is the foster-brother of Francisco. They were much together. Now that Francisco is rich from the gold Don Clarencio paid for the title, they come not much together. But Pedro is rich, too. Mother of God! He gambles and is a fine gentleman. He holds his head high, — even over the Americanos he gambles with. Truly, they say he can shoot with the best of them. He boasts and swells himself, this Pedro! He says if all the old families were like him, they would drive those western swine back over the mountains again."

Clarence raised his eyes, caught a subtle yellow flash from Incarnacion's, gazed at him suddenly, and rose.

"I don't think I have ever seen him," he said quietly. "Thank you for bringing me the spur. But keep the knowledge of it to yourself, good Nascio, for the present."

Nascio nevertheless still lingered. Perceiving which, Clarence handed him a cigarette and proceeded to light one himself. He knew that the vacquero would reroll his, and that that always deliberate occupation

would cover and be an excuse for further confidence.

"The Señora Peyton does not perhaps meet this Pedro in the society of San Francisco?"

"Surely not. The señora is in mourning and goes not out in society, nor would she probably go anywhere where she would meet a dismissed servant of her husband."

Incarnacion slowly lit his cigarette, and said between the puffs, "And the señorita — she would not meet him?"

"Assuredly not."

"And," continued Incarnacion, throwing down the match and putting his foot on it, "if this boaster, this turkey-cock, says she did, you could put him out like that?"

"Certainly," said Clarence, with an easy confidence he was, however, far from feeling, "if he really *said* it — which I doubt."

"Ah, truly," said Incarnacion; "who knows? It may be another Señorita Silsbee."

"The señora's adopted daughter is called *Miss Peyton*, friend Nascio. You forget yourself," said Clarence quietly.

"Ah, pardon!" said Incarnacion with effusive apology; "but she was born Silsbee.

Everybody knows it; she herself has told it to Pepita. The Señor Peyton bequeathed his estate to the Señora Peyton. He named not the señorita! Eh, what would you? It is the common cackle of the barnyard. But *I* say 'Mees Silsbee.' For look you. There is a Silsbee of Sacramento, the daughter of her aunt, who writes letters to her. Pepita has seen them! And possibly it is only that Mees of whom the brigand Pedro boasts."

"Possibly," said Clarence, "but as far as this rancho is concerned, friend Nascio, thou wilt understand — and I look to thee to make the others understand — that there is no Señorita *Silsbee* here, only the Señorita *Peyton*, the respected daughter of the señora thy mistress!" He spoke with the quaint mingling of familiarity and paternal gravity of the Spanish master — a faculty he had acquired at El Refugio in a like vicarious position, and which never failed as a sign of authority. "And now," he added gravely, "get out of this, friend, with God's blessing, and see that thou remember-est what I told thee."

The retainer, with equal gravity, stepped backwards, saluted with his sombrero until the stiff brim scraped the floor, and then solemnly withdrew.

Left to himself, Clarence remained for an instant silent and thoughtful before the oven-like hearth. So! everybody knew Susy's real relations to the Peytons, and everybody but Mrs. Peyton, perhaps, knew that she was secretly corresponding with some one of her own family. In other circumstances he might have found some excuse for this assertion of her independence and love of her kindred, but in her attitude towards Mrs. Peyton it seemed monstrous. It appeared impossible that Mrs. Peyton should not have heard of it, or suspected the young girl's disaffection. Perhaps she had, — it was another burden laid upon her shoulders, — but the proud woman had kept it to herself. A film of moisture came across his eyes. I fear he thought less of the suggestion of Susy's secret meeting with Pedro, or Incarnacion's implied suspicions that Pedro was concerned in Peyton's death, than of this sentimental possibility. He knew that Pedro had been hated by the others on account of his position; he knew the instinctive jealousies of the race and their predisposition to extravagant misconstruction. From what he had gathered, and particularly from the voices he had over-

heard on the Fair Plains Road, it seemed to him that Pedro was more capable of mercenary intrigue than physical revenge. He was not aware of the irrevocable affront put upon Pedro by Peyton, and he had consequently attached no importance to Peyton's own half-scornful intimation of the only kind of retaliation that Pedro would be likely to take. The unsuccessful attempt upon himself he had always thought might have been an accident, or if it was really a premeditated assault, it might have been intended actually for *himself* and not Peyton, as he had first thought, and his old friend had suffered for *him*, through some mistake of the assailant. The purpose, which alone seemed wanting, might have been to remove Clarence as a possible witness who had overheard their conspiracy — how much of it they did not know — on the Fair Plains Road that night. The only clue he held to the murderer in the spur locked in his desk, merely led him beyond the confines of the rancho, but definitely nowhere else. It was, however, some relief to know that the crime was not committed by one of Peyton's retainers, nor the outcome of domestic treachery.

After some consideration he resolved to seek Jim Hooker, who might be possessed of some information respecting Susy's relations, either from the young girl's own confidences or from Jim's personal knowledge of the old frontier families. From a sense of loyalty to Susy and Mrs. Peyton, he had never alluded to the subject before him, but since the young girl's own indiscretion had made it a matter of common report, however distasteful it was to his own feelings, he felt he could not plead the sense of delicacy for her. He had great hopes in what he had always believed was only her exaggeration of fact as well as feeling. And he had an instinctive reliance on her fellow *poseur's* ability to detect it. A few days later, when he found he could safely leave the rancho alone, he rode to Fair Plains.

The floods were out along the turnpike road, and even seemed to have increased since his last journey. The face of the landscape had changed again. One of the lower terraces had become a wild mere of sedge and reeds. The dry and dusty bed of a forgotten brook had reappeared, a full-banked river, crossing the turnpike and compelling a long détour before the traveler could ford

it. But as he approached the Hopkins farm and the opposite clearing and cabin of Jim Hooker, he was quite unprepared for a still more remarkable transformation. The cabin, a three-roomed structure, and its cattle-shed had entirely disappeared! There were no traces or signs of inundation. The land lay on a gentle acclivity above the farm and secure from the effects of the flood, and a part of the ploughed and cleared land around the site of the cabin showed no evidence of overflow on its black, upturned soil. But the house was gone! Only a few timbers too heavy to be removed, the blighting erasions of a few months of occupation, and the dull, blackened area of the site itself were to be seen. The fence alone was intact.

Clarence halted before it, perplexed and astonished. Scarcely two weeks had elapsed since he had last visited it and sat beneath its roof with Jim, and already its few ruins had taken upon themselves the look of years of abandonment and decay. The wild land seemed to have thrown off its yoke of cultivation in a night, and nature rioted again with all its primal forces over the freed soil. Wild oats and mustard were springing al-

ready in the broken furrows, and lank vines were slimily spreading over a few scattered but still unseasoned and sappy shingles. Some battered tin cans and fragments of old clothing looked as remote as if they had been relics of the earliest immigration.

Clarence turned inquiringly towards the Hopkins farmhouse across the road. His arrival, however, had already been noticed, as the door of the kitchen opened in an anticipatory fashion, and he could see the slight figure of Phœbe Hopkins in the doorway, backed by the overlooking heads and shoulders of her parents. The face of the young girl was pale and drawn with anxiety, at which Clarence's simple astonishment took a shade of concern.

"I am looking for Mr. Hooker," he said uneasily. "And I don't seem to be able to find either him or his house."

"And you don't know what 's gone of him?" said the girl quickly.

"No; I have n't seen him for two weeks."

"There, I told you so!" said the girl, turning nervously to her parents. "I knew it. He has n't seen him for two weeks." Then, looking almost tearfully at Clarence's face, she said, "No more have we."

"But," said Clarence impatiently, "something must have happened. Where is his house?"

"Taken away by them jumpers," interrupted the old farmer; "a lot of roughs that pulled it down and carted it off in a jiffy before our very eyes without answerin' a civil question to me or her. But he was n't there, nor before, nor since."

"No," added the old woman, with flashing eyes, "or he 'd let 'em have what ther' was in his six-shooters."

"No, he would n't, mother," said the girl impatiently, "he 'd *changed*, and was agin all them ideas of force and riotin'. He was for peace and law all the time. Why, the day before we missed him he was tellin' me California never would be decent until people obeyed the laws and the titles were settled. And for that reason, because he would n't fight agin the law, or without the consent of the law, they 've killed him, or kidnapped him away."

The girl's lips quivered, and her small brown hands twisted the edges of her blue checked apron. Although this new picture of Jim's peacefulness was as astounding and unsatisfactory as his own disappearance,

there was no doubt of the sincerity of poor Phœbe's impression.

In vain did Clarence point out to them there must be some mistake; that the trespassers — the so-called jumpers — really belonged to the same party as Hooker, and would have no reason to dispossess him; that, in fact, they were all *his*, Clarence's, tenants. In vain he assured them of Hooker's perfect security in possession; that he could have driven the intruders away by the simple exhibition of his lease, or that he could have even called a constable from the town of Fair Plains to protect him from mere lawlessness. In vain did he assure them of his intention to find his missing friend, and reinstate him at any cost. The conviction that the unfortunate young man had been foully dealt with was fixed in the minds of the two women. For a moment Clarence himself was staggered by it.

"You see," said the young girl, with a kindling face, "the day before he came back from Robles, ther' were some queer men hangin' round his cabin, but as they were the same kind that went off with him the day the Sisters' title was confirmed, we thought nothing of it. But when he came

back from you he seemed worried and anxious, and was n't a bit like himself. We thought perhaps he 'd got into some trouble there, or been disappointed. He had n't, had he, Mr. Brant?" continued Phœbe, with an appealing look.

"By no means," said Clarence warmly. "On the contrary, he was able to do his friends good service there, and was successful in what he attempted. Mrs. Peyton was very grateful. Of course he told you what had happened, and what he did for us," continued Clarence, with a smile.

He had already amused himself on the way with a fanciful conception of the exaggerated account Jim had given of his exploits. But the bewildered girl shook her head.

"No, he did n't tell us *anything*."

Clarence was really alarmed. This unprecedented abstention of Hooker's was portentous.

"He did n't say anything but what I told you about law and order," she went on; "but that same night we heard a good deal of talking and shouting in the cabin and around it. And the next day he was talking with father, and wanting to know how

he kept his land without trouble from outsiders."

"And I said," broke in Hopkins, "that I guessed folks did n't bother a man with women folks around, and that I kalkilated that *I* was n't quite as notorious for fightin' as he was."

"And he said," also interrupted Mrs. Hopkins, "and quite in his nat'ral way, too, — gloomy like, you remember, Cyrus," appealingly to her husband, — "that that was his curse."

The smile that flickered around Clarence's mouth faded, however, as he caught sight of Phœbe's pleading, interrogating eyes. It was really too bad. Whatever change had come over the rascal it was too evident that his previous belligerent personality had had its full effect upon the simple girl, and that, hereafter, one pair of honest eyes would be wistfully following him.

Perplexed and indignant, Clarence again closely questioned her as to the personnel of the trespassing party who had been seen once or twice since passing over the field. He had at last elicited enough information to identify one of them as Gilroy, the leader of the party that had invaded Robles

Rancho. His cheek flushed. Even if they had wished to take a theatrical and momentary revenge on Hooker for the passing treachery to them which they had just discovered, although such retaliation was only transitory, and they could not hold the land, it was an insult to Clarence himself, whose tenant Jim was, and subversive of all their legally acquired rights. He would confront this Gilroy at once; his half-wild encampment was only a few miles away, just over the boundaries of the Robles estate. Without stating his intention, he took leave of the Hopkins family with the cheerful assurance that he would probably return with some news of Hooker, and rode away.

The trail became more indistinct and unfrequented as it diverged from the main road, and presently lost itself in the slope towards the east. The horizon grew larger: there were faint bluish lines upon it which he knew were distant mountains; beyond this a still fainter white line — the Sierran snows. Presently he intersected a trail running south, and remarked that it crossed the highway behind him, where he had once met the two mysterious horsemen. They had evidently reached the terrace through

the wild oats by that trail. A little farther on were a few groups of sheds and canvas tents in a bare and open space, with scattered cattle and horsemen, exactly like an encampment, or the gathering of a country fair. As Clarence rode down towards them he could see that his approach was instantly observed, and that a simultaneous movement was made as if to anticipate him. For the first time he realized the possible consequences of his visit, single-handed, but it was too late to retrace his steps. With a glance at his holster, he rode boldly forward to the nearest shed. A dozen men hovered near him, but something in his quiet, determined manner held them aloof. Gilroy was on the threshold in his shirt-sleeves. A single look showed him that Clarence was alone, and with a careless gesture of his hand he warned away his own followers.

"You 've got a sort of easy way of droppin' in whar you ain't invited, Brant," he said with a grim smile, which was not, however, without a certain air of approval. "Got it from your father, did n't you?"

"I don't know, but I don't believe *he* ever thought it necessary to warn twenty

men of the approach of one," replied Clarence, in the same tone. "I had no time to stand on ceremony, for I have just come from Hooker's quarter section at Fair Plains."

Gilroy smiled again, and gazed abstractedly at the sky.

"You know as well as I do," said Clarence, controlling his voice with an effort, "that what you have done there will have to be undone, if you wish to hold even those lawless men of yours together, or keep yourself and them from being run into the brush like highwaymen. I 've no fear for that. Neither do I care to know what was your motive in doing it; but I can only tell you that if it was retaliation, I alone was and still am responsible for Hooker's action at the rancho. I came here to know just what you have done with him, and, if necessary, to take his place."

"You 're just a little too previous in your talk, I reckon, Brant," returned Gilroy lazily, "and as to legality, I reckon we stand on the same level with yourself, just here. Beginnin' with what you came for: as we don't know where your Jim Hooker is, and as we ain't done anythin' to *him*, we

don't exackly see what we could do with *you* in his place. Ez to our motives, — well, we 've got a good deal to say about *that*. We reckoned that he was n't exackly the kind of man we wanted for a neighbor. His pow'ful fightin' style did n't suit us peaceful folks, and we thought it rather worked agin this new 'law and order ' racket to have such a man about, to say nuthin' of it prejudicin' quiet settlers. He had too many revolvers for one man to keep his eye on, and was altogether too much steeped in blood, so to speak, for ordinary washin' and domestic purposes! His hull get up was too deathlike and clammy; so we persuaded him to leave. We just went there, all of us, and exhorted him. We stayed round there two days and nights, takin' turns, talkin' with him, nuthin' more, only selecting subjects in his own style to please him, until he left! And then, as we did n't see any use for his house there, we took it away. Them 's the cold facts, Brant," he added, with a certain convincing indifference that left no room for doubt, "and you can stand by 'em. Now, workin' back to the first principle you laid down, — that we 'll have to *undo* what we 've *done*, — we don't agree with you,

for we 've taken a leaf outer your own book. We 've got it here in black and white. We 've got a bill o' sale of Hooker's house and possession, and we 're on the land in place of him, — *as your tenants.*" He re-entered the shanty, took a piece of paper from a soap-box on the shelf, and held it out to Clarence. "Here it is. It 's a fair and square deal, Brant. We gave him, as it says here, a hundred dollars for it! No humbuggin', but the hard cash, by Jiminy! *And he took the money.*"

The ring of truth in the man's voice was as unmistakable as the signature in Jim's own hand. Hooker had sold out! Clarence turned hastily away.

"We don't know where he went," continued Gilroy grimly, "but I reckon you ain't over anxious to see him *now.* And I kin tell ye something to ease your mind, — he did n't require much persuadin'. And I kin tell ye another, if ye ain't above takin' advice from folks that don't pertend to give it," he added, with the same curious look of interest in his face. "You 've done well to get shut of him, and if you got shut of a few more of his kind that you trust to, you 'd do better."

As if to avoid noticing any angry reply from the young man, he reëntered the cabin and shut the door behind him. Clarence felt the uselessness of further parley, and rode away.

But Gilroy's Parthian arrow rankled as he rode. He was not greatly shocked at Jim's defection, for he was always fully conscious of his vanity and weakness; but he was by no means certain that Jim's extravagance and braggadocio, which he had found only amusing and, perhaps, even pathetic, might not be as provocative and prejudicial to others as Gilroy had said. But, like all sympathetic and unselfish natures, he sought to find some excuse for his old companion's weakness in his own mistaken judgment. He had no business to bring poor Jim on the land, to subject his singular temperament to the temptations of such a life and such surroundings; he should never have made use of his services at the rancho. He had done him harm rather than good in his ill-advised, and, perhaps, *selfish* attempts to help him. I have said that Gilroy's parting warning rankled in his breast, but not ignobly. It wounded the surface of his sensitive nature, but could not taint or cor-

rupt the pure, wholesome blood of the gentleman beneath it. For in Gilroy's warning he saw only his own shortcomings. A strange fatality had marked his friendships. He had been no help to Jim; he had brought no happiness to Susy or Mrs. Peyton, whose disagreement his visit seemed to have accented. Thinking over the mysterious attack upon himself, it now seemed to him possible that, in some obscure way, his presence at the rancho had precipitated the more serious attack on Peyton. If, as it had been said, there was some curse upon his inheritance from his father, he seemed to have made others share it with him. He was riding onward abstractedly, with his head sunk on his breast and his eyes fixed upon some vague point between his horse's sensitive ears, when a sudden, intelligent, forward pricking of them startled him, and an apparition arose from the plain before him that seemed to sweep all other sense away.

It was the figure of a handsome young horseman as abstracted as himself, but evidently on better terms with his own personality. He was dark haired, sallow cheeked, and blue eyed, — the type of the old Span-

ish Californian. A burnt-out cigarette was in his mouth, and he was riding a roan mustang with the lazy grace of his race. But what arrested Clarence's attention more than his picturesque person was the narrow, flexible, long coil of gray horse-hair *riata* which hung from his saddle-bow, but whose knotted and silver-beaded terminating lash he was swirling idly in his narrow brown hand. Clarence knew and instantly recognized it as the ordinary fanciful appendage of a gentleman rider, used for tethering his horse on lonely plains, and always made the object of the most lavish expenditure of decoration and artistic skill. But he was as suddenly filled with a blind, unreasoning sense of repulsion and fury, and lifted his eyes to the man as he approached. What the stranger saw in Clarence's blazing eyes no one but himself knew, for his own became fixed and staring; his sallow cheeks grew lanker and livid; his careless, jaunty bearing stiffened into rigidity, and swerving his horse to one side he suddenly passed Clarence at a furious gallop. The young American wheeled quickly, and for an instant his knees convulsively gripped the flanks of his horse to follow. But the

next moment he recalled himself, and with an effort began to collect his thoughts. What was he intending to do, and for what reason! He had met hundreds of such horsemen before, and caparisoned and accoutred like this, even to the *riata*. And he certainly was not dressed like either of the mysterious horsemen whom he had overheard that moonlight evening. He looked back; the stranger had already slackened his pace, and was slowly disappearing. Clarence turned and rode on his way.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHOUT disclosing the full extent of Jim's defection and desertion, Clarence was able to truthfully assure the Hopkins family of his personal safety, and to promise that he would continue his quest, and send them further news of the absentee. He believed it would be found that Jim had been called away on some important business, but that not daring to leave his new shanty exposed and temptingly unprotected, he had made a virtue of necessity by selling it to his neighbors, intending to build a better house on its site after his return. Having comforted Phœbe, and impulsively conceived further plans for restoring Jim to her, — happily without any recurrence of his previous doubts as to his own efficacy as a special Providence, - he returned to the rancho. If he thought again of Jim's defection and Gilroy's warning, it was only to strengthen himself to a clearer perception of his unselfish duty and singleness of purpose. He

would give up brooding, apply himself more practically to the management of the property, carry out his plans for the foundation of a Landlords' Protective League for the southern counties, become a candidate for the Legislature, and, in brief, try to fill Peyton's place in the county as he had at the rancho. He would endeavor to become better acquainted with the half-breed laborers on the estate and avoid the friction between them and the Americans; he was conscious that he had not made that use of his early familiarity with their ways and language which he might have done. If, occasionally, the figure of the young Spaniard whom he had met on the lonely road obtruded itself on him, it was always with the instinctive premonition that he would meet him again, and the mystery of the sudden repulsion be in some way explained. Thus Clarence! But the momentary impulse that had driven him to Fair Plains, the eagerness to set his mind at rest regarding Susy and her relatives, he had utterly forgotten.

Howbeit some of the energy and enthusiasm that he breathed into these various essays made their impression. He succeeded in forming the Landlords' League; under a

commission suggested by him the straggling boundaries of Robles and the adjacent claims were resurveyed, defined, and mutually protected; even the lawless Gilroy, from extending an amused toleration to the young administrator, grew to recognize and accept him; the *peons* and vacqueros began to have faith in a man who acknowledged them sufficiently to rebuild the ruined Mission Chapel on the estate, and save them the long pilgrimage to Santa Inez on Sundays and saints' days; the San Francisco priest imported from Clarence's old college at San José, and an habitual guest at Clarence's hospitable board, was grateful enough to fill his flock with loyalty to the young *padron*.

He had returned from a long drive one afternoon, and had just thrown himself into an easy-chair with the comfortable consciousness of a rest fairly earned. The dull embers of a fire occasionally glowed in the oven-like hearth, although the open casement of a window let in the soft breath of the south-west trades. The angelus had just rung from the restored chapel, and, mellowed by distance, seemed to Clarence to lend that repose to the wind-swept landscape that it had always lacked.

Suddenly his quick ear detected the sound of wheels in the ruts of the carriage way. Usually his visitors to the *casa* came on horseback, and carts and wagons used only the lower road. As the sound approached nearer, an odd fancy filled his heart with unaccountable pleasure. Could it be Mrs. Peyton making an unexpected visit to the rancho? He held his breath. The vehicle was now rolling on into the *patio*. The clatter of hoofs and a halt were followed by the accents of women's voices. One seemed familiar. He rose quickly, as light footsteps ran along the corridor, and then the door opened impetuously to the laughing face of Susy!

He came towards her hastily, yet with only the simple impulse of astonishment. He had no thought of kissing her, but as he approached, she threw her charming head archly to one side, with a mischievous knitting of her brows and a significant gesture towards the passage, that indicated the proximity of a stranger and the possibility of interruption.

"Hush! Mrs. McClosky's here," she whispered.

"Mrs. McClosky?" repeated Clarence vaguely.

"Yes, of course," impatiently. "My Aunt Jane. Silly! We just cut away down here to surprise you. Aunty 's never seen the place, and here was a good chance."

"And your mother — Mrs. Peyton? Has she — does she?" — stammered Clarence.

"Has she — does she?" mimicked Susy, with increasing impatience. "Why, of course she *does n't* know anything about it. She thinks I 'm visiting Mary Rogers at Oakland. And I am — *afterwards*," she laughed. "I just wrote to Aunt Jane to meet me at Alameda, and we took the stage to Santa Inez and drove on here in a buggy. Was n't it real fun? Tell me, Clarence! You don't say anything! Tell me — was n't it real fun?"

This was all so like her old, childlike, charming, irresponsible self, that Clarence, troubled and bewildered as he was, took her hands and drew her like a child towards him.

"Of course," she went on, yet stopping to smell a rosebud in his buttonhole, "I have a perfect right to come to my own home, goodness knows! and if I bring my own aunt, a married woman, with me, — although," loftily, "there may be a young

unmarried gentleman alone there, — still I fail to see any impropriety in it!"

He was still holding her; but in that instant her manner had completely changed again; the old Susy seemed to have slipped away and evaded him, and he was retaining only a conscious actress in his arms.

"Release me, Mr. Brant, please," she said, with a languid affected glance behind her; "we are not alone."

Then, as the rustling of a skirt sounded nearer in the passage, she seemed to change back to her old self once more, and with a lightning flash of significance whispered, —

"She knows everything!"

To add to Clarence's confusion, the woman who entered cast a quick glance of playful meaning on the separating youthful pair. She was an ineffective blonde with a certain beauty that seemed to be gradually succumbing to the ravages of paint and powder rather than years; her dress appeared to have suffered from an equally unwise excess of ornamentation and trimming, and she gave the general impression of having been intended for exhibition in almost any other light than the one in which she happened to be. There were two or three mud-

stains on the laces of her sleeve and underskirt that were obtrusively incongruous. Her voice, which had, however, a ring of honest intention in it, was somewhat overstrained, and evidently had not yet adjusted itself to the low-ceilinged, conventual-like building.

"There, children, don't mind me! I know I 'm not on in this scene, but I got nervous waiting there, in what you call the 'sallon,' with only those Greaser servants staring round me in a circle, like a regular chorus. My! but it 's anteek here — regular anteek — Spanish." Then, with a glance at Clarence, "So this is Clarence Brant, — your Clarence? Interduce me, Susy."

In his confusion of indignation, pain, and even a certain conception of the grim ludicrousness of the situation, Clarence grasped despairingly at the single sentence of Susy's. "In my own home." Surely, at least, it was *her own home*, and as he was only the business agent of her adopted mother, he had no right to dictate to her under what circumstances she should return to it, or whom she should introduce there. In her independence and caprice Susy might easily have gone elsewhere with this astounding

relative, and would Mrs. Peyton like it better? Clinging to this idea, his instinct of hospitality asserted itself. He welcomed Mrs. McClosky with nervous effusion: —

"I am only Mrs. Peyton's major domo here, but any guest of her *daughter's* is welcome."

"Yes," said Mrs. McClosky, with ostentatious archness, "I reckon Susy and I understand your position here, and you 've got a good berth of it. But we won't trouble you much on Mrs. Peyton's account, will we, Susy? And now she and me will just take a look around the shanty, — it is real old Spanish anteek, ain't it? — and sorter take stock of it, and you young folks will have to tear yourselves apart for a while, and play propriety before me. You 've got to be on your good behavior while I 'm here, I can tell you! I 'm a heavy old 'doo-anna.' Ain't I, Susy? School-ma'ms and mother superiors ain't in the game with *me* for discipline."

She threw her arms around the young girl's waist and drew her towards her affectionately, an action that slightly precipitated some powder upon the black dress of her niece. Susy glanced mischievously at Clar-

ence, but withdrew her eyes presently to let them rest with unmistakable appreciation and admiration on her relative. A pang shot through Clarence's breast. He had never seen her look in that way at Mrs. Peyton. Yet here was this stranger, provincial, overdressed, and extravagant, whose vulgarity was only made tolerable through her good humor, who had awakened that interest which the refined Mrs. Peyton had never yet been able to touch. As Mrs. McClosky swept out of the room with Susy he turned away with a sinking heart.

Yet it was necessary that the Spanish house servants should not suspect this treason to their mistress, and Clarence stopped their childish curiosity about the stranger with a careless and easy acceptance of Susy's sudden visit in the light of an ordinary occurrence, and with a familiarity towards Mrs. McClosky which became the more distasteful to him in proportion as he saw that it was evidently agreeable to her. But, easily responsive, she became speedily confidential. Without a single question from himself, or a contributing remark from Susy, in half an hour she had told him her whole history. How, as Jane Silsbee, an elder

sister of Susy's mother, she had early eloped from the paternal home in Kansas with McClosky, a strolling actor. How she had married him and gone on the stage under his stage name, effectively preventing any recognition by her family. How, coming to California, where her husband had become manager of the theatre at Sacramento, she was indignant to find that her only surviving relation, a sister-in-law, living in the same place, had for a money consideration given up all claim to the orphaned Susy, and how she had resolved to find out "if the poor child was happy." How she succeeded in finding out that she was not happy. How she wrote to her, and even met her secretly at San Francisco and Oakland, and how she had undertaken this journey partly for "a lark," and partly to see Clarence and the property. There was no doubt of the speaker's sincerity; with this outrageous candor there was an equal obliviousness of any indelicacy in her conduct towards Mrs. Peyton that seemed hopeless. Yet he must talk plainly to her; he must say to her what he could not say to Susy; upon *her* Mrs. Peyton's happiness — he believed he was thinking of Susy's also — depended. He

must take the first opportunity of speaking to her alone.

That opportunity came sooner than he had expected. After dinner, Mrs. McClosky turned to Susy, and playfully telling her that she had "to talk business" with Mr. Brant, bade her go to the salon and await her. When the young girl left the room, she looked at Clarence, and, with that assumption of curtness with which coarse but kindly natures believe they overcome the difficulty of delicate subjects, said abruptly: —

"Well, young man, now what 's all this between you and Susy? I 'm looking after her interests — same as if she was my own girl. If you 've got anything to say, now 's your time. And don't you shilly-shally too long over it, either, for you might as well know that a girl like that can have her pick and choice, and be beholden to no one; and when she don't care to choose, there 's me and my husband ready to do for her all the same. We might n't be able to do the anteek Spanish Squire, but we 've got our own line of business, and it 's a comfortable one."

To have this said to him under the roof

of Mrs. Peyton, from whom, in his sensitiveness, he had thus far jealously guarded his own secret, was even more than Clarence's gentleness could stand, and fixed his wavering resolution.

"I don't think we quite understand each other, Mrs. McClosky," he said coldly, but with glittering eyes. "I have certainly something to say to you; if it is not on a subject as pleasant as the one you propose, it is, nevertheless, one that I think you and I are more competent to discuss together."

Then, with quiet but unrelenting directness, he pointed out to her that Susy was a legally adopted daughter of Mrs. Peyton, and, as a minor, utterly under her control; that Mrs. Peyton had no knowledge of any opposing relatives; and that Susy had not only concealed the fact from her, but that he was satisfied that Mrs. Peyton did not even know of Susy's discontent and alienation; that she had tenderly and carefully brought up the helpless orphan as her own child, and even if she had not gained her affection was at least entitled to her obedience and respect; that while Susy's girlish caprice and inexperience excused *her* conduct, Mrs. Peyton and her friends would

have a right to expect more consideration from a person of Mrs. McClosky's maturer judgment. That for these reasons, and as the friend of Mrs. Peyton, whom he could alone recognize as Susy's guardian and the arbiter of her affections, he must decline to discuss the young girl with any reference to himself or his own intentions.

An unmistakable flush asserted itself under the lady's powder.

"Suit yourself, young man, suit yourself," she said, with equally direct resentment and antagonism; "only mebbee you 'll let me tell you that Jim McClosky ain't no fool, and mebbee knows what lawyers think of an arrangement with a sister-in-law that leaves a real sister out! Mebbee that 's a 'Sister's title' you ain't thought of, Mr. Brant! And mebbee you 'll find out that your chance o' gettin' Mrs. Peyton's consent ain't as safe to gamble on as you reckon it is. And mebbee, what 's more to the purpose, if you *did* get it, it might not be just the trump card to fetch Susy with! And to wind up, Mr. Brant, when you *do* have to come down to the bed-rock and me and Jim McClosky, you may find out that him and me have discovered a bet-

ter match for Susy than the son of old Ham Brant, who is trying to play the Spanish grandee off his father's money on a couple of women. And we may n't have to go far to do it — or to get *the real thing*, Mr. Brant!"

Too heartsick and disgusted to even notice the slur upon himself or the import of her last words, Clarence only rose and bowed as she jumped up from the table. But as she reached the door he said, half appealingly: —

"Whatever are your other intentions, Mrs. McClosky, as we are both Susy's guests, I beg you will say nothing of this to her while we are here, and particularly that you will not allow her to think for a moment that I have discussed *my* relations to her with anybody."

She flung herself out of the door without a reply; but on entering the dark low-ceilinged drawing-room she was surprised to find that Susy was not there. She was consequently obliged to return to the veranda, where Clarence had withdrawn, and to somewhat ostentatiously demand of the servants that Susy should be sent to her room at once. But the young girl was not in her

own room, and was apparently nowhere to be found. Clarence, who had now fully determined as a last resource to make a direct appeal to Susy herself, listened to this fruitless search with some concern. She could not have gone out in the rain, which was again falling. She might be hiding somewhere to avoid a recurrence of the scene she had perhaps partly overheard. He turned into the corridor that led to Mrs. Peyton's boudoir. As he knew that it was locked, he was surprised to see by the dim light of the hanging lamp that a duplicate key to the one in his desk was in the lock. It must be Susy's, and the young girl had probably taken refuge there. He knocked gently. There was a rustle in the room and the sound of a chair being moved, but no reply. Impelled by a sudden instinct he opened the door, and was met by a cool current of air from some open window. At the same moment the figure of Susy approached him from the semi-darkness of the interior.

"I did not know you were here," said Clarence, much relieved, he knew not why, "but I am glad, for I wanted to speak with you alone for a few moments."

She did not reply, but he drew a match from his pocket and lit the two candles which he knew stood on the table. The wick of one was still warm, as if it had been recently extinguished. As the light slowly radiated, he could see that she was regarding him with an air of affected unconcern, but a somewhat heightened color. It was like her, and not inconsistent with his idea that she had come there to avoid an after scene with Mrs. McClosky or himself, or perhaps both. The room was not disarranged in any way. The window that was opened was the casement of the deep embrasured one in the rear wall, and the light curtain before it still swayed occasionally in the night wind.

"I 'm afraid I had a row with your aunt, Susy," he began lightly, in his old familiar way; "but I had to tell her I did n't think her conduct to Mrs. Peyton was exactly the square thing towards one who had been as devoted to you as she has been."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't go over all that again," said Susy impatiently. "I 've had enough of it."

Clarence flushed, but recovered himself.

"Then you overheard what I said, and know what I think," he said calmly.

"I knew it *before*," said the young girl, with a slight supercilious toss of the head, and yet a certain abstraction of manner as she went to the window and closed it. "Anybody could see it! I know you always wanted me to stay here with Mrs. Peyton, and be coddled and monitored and catechised and shut up away from any one, until *you* had been coddled and monitored and catechised by somebody else sufficiently to suit her ideas of your being a fit husband for me. I told aunty it was no use our coming here to — to" —

"To do what?" asked Clarence.

"To put some spirit into you," said the young girl, turning upon him sharply; "to keep you from being tied to that woman's apron-strings. To keep her from making a slave of you as she would of me. But it is of no use. Mary Rogers was right when she said you had no wish to please anybody but Mrs. Peyton, and no eyes for anybody but her. And if it had n't been too ridiculous, considering her age and yours, she 'd say you were dead in love with her."

For an instant Clarence felt the blood

rush to his face and then sink away, leaving him pale and cold. The room, which had seemed to whirl around him, and then fade away, returned with appalling distinctness, — the distinctness of memory, — and a vision of the first day that he had seen Mrs. Peyton sitting there, as he seemed to see her now. For the first time there flashed upon him the conviction that the young girl had spoken the truth, and had brusquely brushed the veil from his foolish eyes. He *was* in love with Mrs. Peyton! That was what his doubts and hesitation regarding Susy meant. That alone was the source, secret, and limit of his vague ambition.

But with the conviction came a singular calm. In the last few moments he seemed to have grown older, to have loosed the bonds of old companionship with Susy, and the later impression she had given him of her mature knowledge, and moved on far beyond her years and experience. And it was with an authority that was half paternal, and in a voice he himself scarcely recognized, that he said: —

"If I did not know you were prejudiced by a foolish and indiscreet woman, I should believe that you were trying to insult me as

you have your adopted mother, and would save you the pain of doing both in *her* house by leaving it now and forever. But because I believe you are controlled against your best instinct by that woman, I shall remain here with you to frustrate her as best I can, or until I am able to lay everything before Mrs. Peyton except the foolish speech you have just made."

The young girl laughed. "Why not *that* one too, while you 're about it? See what she 'll say."

"I shall tell her," continued Clarence calmly, "only what *you* yourself have made it necessary for me to tell her to save you from folly and disgrace, and only enough to spare her the mortification of hearing it first from her own servants."

"Hearing *what* from her own servants? What do you mean? How dare you?" demanded the young girl sharply.

She was quite real in her anxiety now, although her attitude of virtuous indignation struck him as being like all her emotional expression, namely, acting.

"I mean that the servants know of your correspondence with Mrs. McClosky, and that she claims to be your aunt," returned

Clarence. "They know that you confided to Pepita. They believe that either Mrs. McClosky or you have seen" —

He had stopped suddenly. He was about to say that the servants (particularly Incarnacion) knew that Pedro had boasted of having met Susy, when, for the first time, the tremendous significance of what he had hitherto considered as merely an idle falsehood flashed upon him.

"Seen whom?" repeated Susy in a higher voice, impatiently stamping her foot.

Clarence looked at her, and in her excited, questioning face saw a confirmation of his still half-formed suspicions. In his own abrupt pause and knitted eyebrows she must have read his thoughts also. Their eyes met. Her violet pupils dilated, trembled, and then quickly shifted as she suddenly stiffened into an attitude of scornful indifference, almost grotesque in its unreality. His eyes slowly turned to the window, the door, the candles on the table and the chair before it, and then came back to her face again. Then he drew a deep breath.

"I give no heed to the idle gossip of servants, Susy," he said slowly. "I have no belief that you have ever contemplated

anything worse than an act of girlish folly, or the gratification of a passing caprice. Neither do I want to appeal to you or frighten you, but I must tell you now, that I know certain facts that might make such a simple act of folly monstrous, inconceivable in *you*, and almost accessory to a crime! I can tell you no more. But so satisfied am I of such a possibility, that I shall not scruple to take any means — the strongest — to prevent even the remotest chance of it. Your aunt has been looking for you; you had better go to her now. I will close the room and lock the door. Meantime, I should advise you not to sit so near an open window with a candle at night in this locality. Even if it might not be dangerous for you, it might be fatal to the foolish creatures it might attract."

He took the key from the door as he held it open for her to pass out. She uttered a shrill little laugh, like a nervous, mischievous child, and, slipping out of her previous artificial attitude as if it had been a mantle, ran out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

As Susy's footsteps died away, Clarence closed the door, walked to the window, and examined it closely. The bars had been restored since he had wrenched them off to give ingress to the family on the day of recapture. He glanced around the room; nothing seemed to have been disturbed. Nevertheless he was uneasy. The suspicions of a frank, trustful nature when once aroused are apt to be more general and far-reaching than the specific distrusts of the disingenuous, for they imply the overthrow of a whole principle and not a mere detail. Clarence's conviction that Susy had seen Pedro recently since his dismissal led him into the wildest surmises of her motives. It was possible that without her having reason to suspect Pedro's greater crime, he might have confided to her his intention of reclaiming the property and installing her as the mistress and chatelaine of the rancho. The idea was one that might have appealed to

Susy's theatrical imagination. He recalled Mrs. McClosky's sneer at his own pretensions and her vague threats of a rival of more lineal descent. The possible infidelity of Susy to himself touched him lightly when the first surprise was over; indeed, it scarcely could be called infidelity, if she knew and believed Mary Rogers's discovery; and the conviction that he and she had really never loved each other now enabled him, as he believed, to look at her conduct dispassionately. Yet it was her treachery to Mrs. Peyton and not to himself that impressed him most, and perhaps made him equally unjust, through his affections.

He extinguished the candles, partly from some vague precautions he could not explain, and partly to think over his fears in the abstraction and obscurity of the semi-darkness. The higher windows suffused a faint light on the ceiling, and, assisted by the dark lantern-like glow cast on the opposite wall by the tunnel of the embrasured window, the familiar outlines of the room and its furniture came back to him. Somewhat in this fashion also, in the obscurity and quiet, came back to him the events he had overlooked and forgotten. He recalled now

some gossip of the servants, and hints dropped by Susy of a violent quarrel between Peyton and Pedro, which resulted in Pedro's dismissal, but which now seemed clearly attributable to some graver cause than inattention and insolence. He recalled Mary Rogers's playful pleasantries with Susy about Pedro, and Susy's mysterious air, which he had hitherto regarded only as part of her exaggeration. He remembered Mrs. Peyton's unwarrantable uneasiness about Susy, which he had either overlooked or referred entirely to himself; she must have suspected something. To his quickened imagination, in this ruin of his faith and trust, he believed that Hooker's defection was either part of the conspiracy, or that he had run away to avoid being implicated with Susy in its discovery. This, too, was the significance of Gilroy's parting warning. He and Mrs. Peyton alone had been blind and confiding in the midst of this treachery, and even *he* had been blind to his own real affections.

The wind had risen again, and the faint light on the opposite wall grew tremulous and shifting with the movement of the foliage without. But presently the glow be-

came quite obliterated, as if by the intervention of some opaque body outside the window. He rose hurriedly and went to the casement. But at the same moment he fancied he heard the jamming of a door or window in quite another direction, and his examination of the casement before him showed him only the silver light of the thinly clouded sky falling uninterruptedly through the bars and foliage on the interior of the whitewashed embrasure. Then a conception of his mistake flashed across him. The line of the *casa* was long, straggling, and exposed elsewhere; why should the attempt to enter or communicate with any one within be confined only to this single point? And why not satisfy himself at once if any trespassers were lounging around the walls, and then confront them boldly in the open? Their discovery and identification was as important as the defeat of their intentions.

He relit the candle, and, placing it on a small table by the wall beyond the visual range of the window, rearranged the curtain so that, while it permitted the light to pass out, it left the room in shadow. He then opened the door softly, locked it behind him, and passed noiselessly into the hall. Susy's

and Mrs. McClosky's rooms were at the further end of the passage, but between them and the boudoir was the open *patio*, and the low murmur of the voices of servants, who still lingered until he should dismiss them for the night. Turning back, he moved silently down the passage, until he reached the narrow arched door to the garden. This he unlocked and opened with the same stealthy caution. The rain had recommenced. Not daring to risk a return to his room, he took from a peg in the recess an old waterproof cloak and "sou'wester" of Peyton's, which still hung there, and passed out into the night, locking the door behind him. To keep the knowledge of his secret patrol from the stablemen, he did not attempt to take out his own horse, but trusted to find some vacquero's mustang in the corral. By good luck an old "Blue Grass" hack of Peyton's, nearest the stockade as he entered, allowed itself to be quickly caught. Using its rope headstall for a bridle, Clarence vaulted on its bare back, and paced cautiously out into the road. Here he kept the curve of the long line of stockade until he reached the outlying field where, half hidden in the withered, sapless,

but still standing stalks of grain, he slowly began a circuit of the *casa*.

The misty gray dome above him, which an invisible moon seemed to have quicksilvered over, alternately lightened and darkened with passing gusts of fine rain. Nevertheless he could see the outline of the broad quadrangle of the house quite distinctly, except on the west side, where a fringe of writhing willows beat the brown adobe walls with their imploring arms at every gust. Elsewhere nothing moved; the view was uninterrupted to where the shining, watery sky met the equally shining, watery plain. He had already made a half circuit of the house, and was still noiselessly picking his way along the furrows, muffled with soaked and broken-down blades, and the velvety upspringing of the "volunteer" growth, when suddenly, not fifty yards before him, without sound or warning, a figure rode out of the grain upon the open cross-road, and deliberately halted with a listless, abstracted, waiting air. Clarence instantly recognized one of his own vacqueros, an undersized half-breed, but he as instantly divined that he was only an outpost or confederate, stationed to give the alarm. The

same precaution had prevented each hearing the other, and the lesser height of the vaquero had rendered him indistinguishable as he preceded Clarence among the grain. As the young man made no doubt that the real trespasser was nearer the *casa*, along the line of willows, he wheeled to intercept him without alarming his sentry. Unfortunately, his horse answered the rope bridle clumsily, and splashed in striking out. The watcher quickly raised his head, and Clarence knew that his only chance was now to suppress him. Determined to do this at any hazard, with a threatening gesture he charged boldly down upon him.

But he had not crossed half the distance between them when the man uttered an appalling cry, so wild and despairing that it seemed to chill even the hot blood in Clarence's veins, and dashed frenziedly down the cross-road into the interminable plain. Before Clarence could determine if that cry was a signal or an involuntary outburst, it was followed instantly by the sound of frightened and struggling hoofs clattering against the wall of the *casa*, and a swaying of the shrubbery near the back gate of the *patio*. Here was his real quarry! With-

out hesitation he dug his heels into the flanks of his horse and rode furiously towards it. As he approached, a long tremor seemed to pass through the shrubbery, with the retreating sound of horse hoofs. The unseen trespasser had evidently taken the alarm and was fleeing, and Clarence dashed in pursuit. Following the sound, for the shrubbery hid the fugitive from view, he passed the last wall of the *casa;* but it soon became evident that the unknown had the better horse. The hoof-beats grew fainter and fainter, and at times appeared even to cease, until his own approach started them again, eventually to fade away in the distance. In vain Clarence dug his heels into the flanks of his heavier steed, and regretted his own mustang; and when at last he reached the edge of the thicket he had lost both sight and sound of the fugitive. The descent to the lower terrace lay before him empty and desolate. The man had escaped!

He turned slowly back with baffled anger and vindictiveness. However, he had prevented something, although he knew not what. The principal had got away, but he had identified his confederate, and for the

first time held a clue to his mysterious visitant. There was no use to alarm the household, which did not seem to have been disturbed. The trespassers were far away by this time, and the attempt would hardly be repeated that night. He made his way quietly back to the corral, let loose his horse, and regained the *casa* unobserved. He unlocked the arched door in the wall, reëntered the darkened passage, stopped a moment to open the door of the boudoir, glance at the closely fastened casement, and extinguish the still burning candle, and, relocking the door securely, made his way to his own room.

But he could not sleep. The whole incident, over so quickly, had nevertheless impressed him deeply, and yet like a dream. The strange yell of the vacquero still rang in his ears, but with an unearthly and superstitious significance that was even more dreamlike in its meaning. He awakened from a fitful slumber to find the light of morning in the room, and Incarnacion standing by his bedside.

The yellow face of the steward was greenish with terror, and his lips were dry.

"Get up, Señor Clarencio; get up at

once, my master. Strange things have happened. Mother of God protect us!"

Clarence rolled to his feet, with the events of the past night struggling back upon his consciousness.

"What mean you, Nascio?" he said, grasping the man's arm, which was still mechanically making the sign of the cross, as he muttered incoherently. "Speak, I command you!"

"It is José, the little vacquero, who is even now at the *padre's* house, raving as a lunatic, stricken as a madman with terror! He has seen him, — the dead alive! Save us!"

"Are you mad yourself, Nascio?" said Clarence. "Whom has he seen?"

"Whom? God help us! the old *padron* — Señor Peyton himself! He rushed towards him here, in the *patio*, last night — out of the air, the sky, the ground, he knew not, — his own self, wrapped in his old storm cloak and hat, and riding his own horse, — erect, terrible, and menacing, with an awful hand upholding a rope — so! He saw him with these eyes, as I see you. What *he* said to him, God knows! The priest, perhaps, for he has made confession!"

In a flash of intelligence Clarence comprehended all. He rose grimly and began to dress himself.

"Not a word of this to the women, — to any one, Nascio, dost thou understand?" he said curtly. "It may be that José has been partaking too freely of aguardiente, — it is possible. I will see the priest myself. But what possesses thee? Collect thyself, good Nascio."

But the man was still trembling.

"It is not all, — Mother of God! it is not all, master!" he stammered, dropping to his knees and still crossing himself. "This morning, beside the corral, they find the horse of Pedro Valdez splashed and spattered on saddle and bridle, and in the stirrup, — dost thou hear? the *stirrup*, — hanging, the torn-off boot of Valdez! Ah, God! The same as *his!* Now do you understand? It is *his* vengeance. No! Jesu forgive me! it is the vengeance of God!"

Clarence was staggered.

"And you have not found Valdez? You have looked for him?" he said, hurriedly throwing on his clothes.

"Everywhere, — all over the plain. The whole rancho has been out since sunrise, —

here and there and everywhere. And there is nothing! Of course not. What would you?" He pointed solemnly to the ground.

"Nonsense!" said Clarence, buttoning his coat and seizing his hat. "Follow me."

He ran down the passage, followed by Incarnacion, through the excited, gesticulating crowd of servants in the *patio*, and out of the back gate. He turned first along the wall of the *casa* towards the barred window of the boudoir. Then a cry came from Incarnacion.

They ran quickly forward. Hanging from the grating of the window, like a mass of limp and saturated clothes, was the body of Pedro Valdez, with one unbooted foot dangling within an inch of the ground. His head was passed inside the grating and fixed as at that moment when the first spring of the frightened horse had broken his neck between the bars as in a garrote, and the second plunge of the terrified animal had carried off his boot in the caught stirrup when it escaped.

CHAPTER XI.

THE winter rains were over and gone, and the whole long line of Californian coast was dashed with color. There were miles of yellow and red poppies, leagues of lupines that painted the gently rounded hills with soft primary hues, and long continuous slopes, like low mountain systems, of daisies and dandelions. At Sacramento it was already summer; the yellow river was flashing and intolerable; the tule and marsh grasses were lush and long; the bloom of cottonwood and sycamore whitened the outskirts of the city, and as Cyrus Hopkins and his daughter Phœbe looked from the veranda of the Placer Hotel, accustomed as they were to the cool trade winds of the coast valleys, they felt homesick from the memory of eastern heats.

Later, when they were surveying the long dinner tables at the table d'hôte with something of the uncomfortable and shamefaced loneliness of the provincial, Phœbe uttered

a slight cry and clutched her father's arm. Mr. Hopkins stayed the play of his squared elbows and glanced inquiringly at his daughter's face. There was a pretty animation in it, as she pointed to a figure that had just entered. It was that of a young man attired in the extravagance rather than the taste of the prevailing fashion, which did not, however, in the least conceal a decided rusticity of limb and movement. A long mustache, which looked unkempt, even in its pomatumed stiffness, and lank, dark hair that had bent but never curled under the barber's iron, made him notable even in that heterogeneous assembly.

"That 's he," whispered Phœbe.

"Who?" said her father.

Alas for the inconsistencies of love! The blush came with the name and not the vision.

"Mr. Hooker," she stammered.

It was, indeed, Jim Hooker. But the rôle of his exaggeration was no longer the same; the remorseful gloom in which he had been habitually steeped had changed into a fatigued, yet haughty, fastidiousness more in keeping with his fashionable garments. He was more peaceful, yet not entirely

placable, and, as he sat down at a side table and pulled down his striped cuffs with his clasped fingers, he cast a glance of critical disapproval on the general company. Nevertheless, he seemed to be furtively watchful of his effect upon them, and as one or two whispered and looked towards him, his consciousness became darkly manifest.

All of which might have intimidated the gentle Phœbe, but did not discompose her father. He rose, and crossing over to Hooker's table, clapped him heartily on the back.

"How do, Hooker? I didn't recognize you in them fine clothes, but Phœbe guessed as how it was you."

Flushed, disconcerted, irritated, but always in wholesome awe of Mr. Hopkins, Jim returned his greeting awkwardly and half hysterically. How he would have received the more timid Phœbe is another question. But Mr. Hopkins, without apparently noticing these symptoms, went on: —

"We 're only just down, Phœbe and me, and as I guess we 'll want to talk over old times, we 'll come alongside o' you. Hold on, and I 'll fetch her."

The interval gave the unhappy Jim a

chance to recover himself, to regain his vanished cuffs, display his heavy watch-chain, curl his mustache, and otherwise reassume his air of blasé fastidiousness. But the transfer made, Phœbe, after shaking hands, became speechless under these perfections. Not so her father.

"If there 's anything in looks, you seem to be prospering," he said grimly; "unless you 're in the tailorin' line, and you 're only showin' off stock. What mout ye be doing?"

"Ye ain't bin long in Sacramento, I reckon?" suggested Jim, with patronizing pity.

"No, we only came this morning," returned Hopkins.

"And you ain't bin to the theatre?" continued Jim.

"No."

"Nor moved much in — in — gin'ral fash'nable sassiety?"

"Not yet," interposed Phœbe, with an air of faint apology.

"Nor seen any of them large posters on the fences, of 'The Prairie Flower; or, Red-handed Dick,' — three-act play with five tableaux, — just the biggest sensation out,

— runnin' for forty nights, — money turned away every night, — standin' room only?" continued Jim, with prolonged toleration.

"No."

"Well, *I* play Red-handed Dick. I thought you might have seen it and recognized me. All those people over there," darkly indicating the long table, "know me. A fellow can't stand it, you know, being stared at by such a vulgar, low-bred lot. It 's gettin' too fresh here. I 'll have to give the landlord notice and cut the whole hotel. They don't seem to have ever seen a gentleman and a professional before."

"Then you 're a play-actor now?" said the farmer, in a tone which did not, however, exhibit the exact degree of admiration which shone in Phœbe's eyes.

"For the present," said Jim, with lofty indifference. "You see I was in — in partnership with McClosky, the manager, and I did n't like the style of the chump that was doin' Red-handed Dick, so I offered to take his place one night to show him how. And by Jinks! the audience, after that night, would n't let anybody else play it, — would n't stand even the biggest, highest-priced stars in it! I reckon," he added

gloomily, "I 'll have to run the darned thing in all the big towns in Californy, — if I don't have to go East with it after all, just for the business. But it 's an awful grind on a man, — leaves him no time, along of the invitations he gets, and what with being run after in the streets and stared at in the hotels he don't get no privacy. There 's men, and women, too, over at that table, that just lie in wait for me here till I come, and don't lift their eyes off me. I wonder they don't bring their opery-glasses with them."

Concerned, sympathizing, and indignant, poor Phœbe turned her brown head and honest eyes in that direction. But because they were honest, they could not help observing that the other table did not seem to be paying the slightest attention to the distinguished impersonator of Red-handed Dick. Perhaps he had been overheard.

"Then that was the reason ye did n't come back to your location. I always guessed it was because you 'd got wind of the smash-up down there, afore we did," said Hopkins grimly.

"What smash-up?" asked Jim, with slightly resentful quickness.

"Why, the smash-up of the Sisters' title, — did n't you hear that?"

There was a slight movement of relief and a return of gloomy hauteur in Jim's manner.

"No, we don't know much of what goes on in the cow counties, up here."

"Ye mout, considerin' it concerns some o' your friends," returned Hopkins dryly. "For the Sisters' title went smash as soon as it was known that Pedro Valdez — the man as started it — had his neck broken outside the walls o' Robles Rancho; and they do say as this yer Brant, *your* friend, had suthin' to do with the breaking of it, though it was laid to the ghost of old Peyton. Anyhow, there was such a big skeer that one of the Greaser gang, who thought he 'd seen the ghost, being a Papist, to save his everlasting soul went to the priest and confessed. But the priest would n't give him absolution until he 'd blown the hull thing, and made it public. And then it turned out that all the dockyments for the title, and even the custom-house paper, were *forged* by Pedro Valdez, and put on the market by his confederates. And that 's just where *your* friend, Clarence Brant,

comes in, for *he* had bought up the whole title from them fellers. Now, either, as some say, he was in the fraud from the beginnin', and never paid anything, or else he was an all-fired fool, and had parted with his money like one. Some allow that the reason was that he was awfully sweet on Mrs. Peyton's adopted daughter, and ez the parents did n't approve of him, he did *this* so as to get a holt over them by the property. But he 's a ruined man, anyway, now; for they say he 's such a darned fool that he 's goin' to pay for all the improvements that the folks who bought under him put into the land, and that 'll take his last cent. I thought I 'd tell you that, for I suppose *you* 've lost a heap in your improvements, and will put in your claim?"

"I reckon I put nearly as much into it as Clar Brant did," said Jim gloomily, "but I ain't goin' to take a cent from him, or go back on him now."

The rascal could not resist this last mendacious opportunity, although he was perfectly sincere in his renunciation, touched in his sympathy, and there was even a film of moisture in his shifting eyes.

Phœbe was thrilled with the generosity of

this noble being, who could be unselfish even in his superior condition. She added softly: —

"And they say that the girl did not care for him at all, but was actually going to run off with Pedro, when he stopped her and sent for Mrs. Peyton."

To her surprise, Jim's face flushed violently.

"It 's all a dod-blasted lie," he said, in a thick stage whisper. "It 's only the hog-wash them Greasers and Pike County galoots ladle out to each other around the stove in a county grocery. But," recalling himself loftily, and with a tolerant wave of his bediamonded hand, "wot kin you expect from one of them cow counties? They ain't satisfied till they drive every gentleman out of the darned gopher-holes they call their 'kentry.'"

In her admiration of what she believed to be a loyal outburst for his friend, Phœbe overlooked the implied sneer at her provincial home. But her father went on with a perfunctory, exasperating, dusty aridity: —

"That mebbee ez mebbee, Mr. Hooker, but the story down in our precinct goes that she gave Mrs. Peyton the slip, — chucked

up her situation as adopted darter, and went off with a queer sort of a cirkiss woman, — one of her own *kin*, and I reckon one of her own *kind*."

To this Mr. Hooker offered no further reply than a withering rebuke of the waiter, a genteel abstraction, and a lofty change of subject. He pressed upon them two tickets for the performance, of which he seemed to have a number neatly clasped in an india-rubber band, and advised them to come early. They would see him after the performance and sup together. He must leave them now, as he had to be punctually at the theatre, and if he lingered he should be pestered by interviewers. He withdrew under a dazzling display of cuff and white handkerchief, and with that inward swing of the arm and slight bowiness of the leg generally recognized in his profession as the lounging exit of high comedy.

The mingling of awe and an uneasy sense of changed relations which that meeting with Jim had brought to Phœbe was not lessened when she entered the theatre with her father that evening, and even Mr. Hopkins seemed to share her feelings. The theatre was large, and brilliant in decora-

tion, the seats were well filled with the same heterogeneous mingling she had seen in the dining-room at the Placer Hotel, but in the parquet were some fashionable costumes and cultivated faces. Mr. Hopkins was not altogether so sure that Jim had been "only gassing." But the gorgeous drop curtain, representing an allegory of Californian prosperity and abundance, presently uprolled upon a scene of Western life almost as striking in its glaring unreality. From a rose-clad English cottage in a subtropical landscape skipped "Rosalie, the Prairie Flower." The briefest of skirts, the most unsullied of stockings, the tiniest of slippers, and the few diamonds that glittered on her fair neck and fingers, revealed at once the simple and unpretending daughter of the American backwoodsman. A tumult of delighted greeting broke from the audience. The bright color came to the pink, girlish cheeks, gratified vanity danced in her violet eyes, and as she piquantly bowed her acknowledgments, this great breath of praise seemed to transfigure and possess her. A very young actor who represented the giddy world in a straw hat and with an effeminate manner was alternately petted and

girded at by her during the opening exposition of the plot, until the statement that a "dark destiny" obliged her to follow her uncle in an emigrant train across the plains closed the act, apparently extinguished him, and left *her* the central figure. So far, she evidently was the favorite. A singular aversion to her crept into the heart of Phœbe.

But the second act brought an Indian attack upon the emigrant train, and here "Rosalie" displayed the archest heroism and the pinkest and most distracting self-possession, in marked contrast to the giddy worldling who, having accompanied her apparently for comic purposes best known to himself, cowered abjectly under wagons, and was pulled ignominiously out of straw, until Red Dick swept out of the wings with a chosen band and a burst of revolvers and turned the tide of victory. Attired as a picturesque combination of the Neapolitan smuggler, river-bar miner, and Mexican vacquero, Jim Hooker instantly began to justify the plaudits that greeted him and the most sanguinary hopes of the audience. A gloomy but fascinating cloud of gunpowder and dark intrigue from that moment hung about the stage.

Yet in this sombre obscuration Rosalie had passed a happy six months, coming out with her character and stockings equally unchanged and unblemished, to be rewarded with the hand of Red Dick and the discovery of her father, the governor of New Mexico, as a white-haired, but objectionable vacquero, at the fall of the curtain.

Through this exciting performance Phœbe sat with a vague and increasing sense of loneliness and distrust. She did not know that Hooker had added to his ordinary inventive exaggeration the form of dramatic composition. But she had early detected the singular fact that such shadowy outlines of plot as the piece possessed were evidently based on his previous narrative of his *own* experiences, and the saving of Susy Peyton — by himself! There was the episode of their being lost on the plains, as he had already related it to her, with the addition of a few years to Susy's age and some vivid picturesqueness to himself as Red Dick. She was not, of course, aware that the part of the giddy worldling was Jim's own conception of the character of Clarence. But what, even to her provincial taste, seemed the extravagance of the piece, she felt, in

some way, reflected upon the truthfulness of the story she had heard. It seemed to be a parody on himself, and in the laughter which some of the most thrilling points produced in certain of the audience, she heard an echo of her own doubts. But even this she could have borne if Jim's confidence had not been given to the general public; it was no longer *hers* alone, she shared it with them. And this strange, bold girl, who acted with him, — the "Blanche Belville" of the bills, — how often he must have told *her* the story, and yet how badly she had learned it! It was not her own idea of it, nor of *him*. In the last extravagant scene she turned her weary and half-shamed eyes from the stage and looked around the theatre. Among a group of loungers by the wall a face that seemed familiar was turned towards her own with a look of kindly and sympathetic recognition. It was the face of Clarence Brant. When the curtain fell, and she and her father rose to go, he was at their side. He seemed older and more superior looking than she had ever thought him before, and there was a gentle yet sad wisdom in his eyes and voice that comforted her even while it made her feel like crying.

"You are satisfied that no harm has come to our friend," he said pleasantly. "Of course you recognized him?"

"Oh, yes; we met him to-day," said Phœbe. Her provincial pride impelled her to keep up a show of security and indifference. "We are going to supper with him."

Clarence slightly lifted his brows.

"You are more fortunate than I am," he said smilingly. "I only arrived here at seven, and I must leave at midnight."

Phœbe hesitated a moment, then said with affected carelessness: —

"What do you think of the young girl who plays with him? Do you know her? Who is she?"

He looked at her quickly, and then said, with some surprise: —

"Did he not tell you?"

"No."

"She *was* the adopted daughter of Mrs. Peyton, — Miss Susan Silsbee," he said gravely.

"Then she *did* run away from home as they said," said Phœbe impulsively.

"Not *exactly* as they said," said Clarence gently. "She elected to make her home with her aunt, Mrs. McClosky, who is the

wife of the manager of this theatre, and she adopted the profession a month ago. As it now appears that there was some informality in the old articles of guardianship, Mrs. Peyton would have been powerless to prevent her from doing either, even if she had wished to."

The infelicity of questioning Clarence regarding Susy suddenly flashed upon the forgetful Phœbe, and she colored. Yet, although sad, he did not look like a rejected lover.

"Of course, if she is here with her own relatives, that makes all the difference," she said gently. "It is protection."

"Certainly," said Clarence.

"And," continued Phœbe hesitatingly, "she is playing with — with — an old friend — Mr. Hooker!"

"That is quite proper, too, considering their relations," said Clarence tolerantly.

"I — don't — understand," stammered Phœbe.

The slightly cynical smile on Clarence's face changed as he looked into Phœbe's eyes.

"I 've just heard that they are married," he returned gently.

CHAPTER XII.

NOWHERE had the long season of flowers brought such glory as to the broad plains and slopes of Robles Rancho. By some fortuitous chance of soil, or flood, or drifting pollen, the three terraces had each taken a distinct and separate blossom and tint of color. The straggling line of corral, the crumbling wall of the old garden, the outlying chapel, and even the brown walls of the *casa* itself, were half sunken in the tall racemes of crowding lupines, until from the distance they seemed to be slowly settling in the profundity of a dark-blue sea. The second terrace was a league-long flow of gray and gold daisies, in which the cattle dazedly wandered mid-leg deep. A perpetual sunshine of yellow dandelions lay upon the third. The gentle slope to the dark-green *cañada* was a broad cataract of crimson poppies. Everywhere where water had stood, great patches of color had taken its place. It seemed as if the rains had ceased

only that the broken heavens might drop flowers.

Never before had its beauty — a beauty that seemed built upon a cruel, youthful, obliterating forgetfulness of the past — struck Clarence as keenly as when he had made up his mind that he must leave the place forever. For the tale of his mischance and ill-fortune, as told by Hopkins, was unfortunately true. When he discovered that in his desire to save Peyton's house by the purchase of the Sisters' title he himself had been the victim of a gigantic fraud, he accepted the loss of the greater part of his fortune with resignation, and was even satisfied by the thought that he had at least effected the possession of the property for Mrs. Peyton. But when he found that those of his tenants who had bought under him had acquired only a dubious possession of their lands and no title, he had unhesitatingly reimbursed them for their improvements with the last of his capital. Only the lawless Gilroy had good-humoredly declined. The quiet acceptance of the others did not, unfortunately, preclude their settled belief that Clarence had participated in the fraud, and that even now

his restitution was making a dangerous precedent, subversive of the best interests of the State, and discouraging to immigration. Some doubted his sanity. Only one, struck with the sincerity of his motive, hesitated to take his money, with a look of commiseration on his face.

"Are you not satisfied?" asked Clarence, smiling.

"Yes, but" —

"But what?"

"Nothin'. Only I was thinkin' that a man like you must feel awful lonesome in Calforny!"

Lonely he was, indeed; but his loneliness was not the loss of fortune nor what it might bring. Perhaps he had never fully realized his wealth; it had been an accident rather than a custom of his life, and when it had failed in the only test he had made of its power, it is to be feared that he only sentimentally regretted it. It was too early yet for him to comprehend the veiled blessings of the catastrophe in its merciful disruption of habits and ways of life; his loneliness was still the hopeless solitude left by vanished ideals and overthrown idols. He was satisfied that he had never cared for

Susy, but he still cared for the belief that he had.

After the discovery of Pedro's body that fatal morning, a brief but emphatic interview between himself and Mrs. McClosky had followed. He had insisted upon her immediately accompanying Susy and himself to Mrs. Peyton in San Francisco. Horror-stricken and terrified at the catastrophe, and frightened by the strange looks of the excited servants, they did not dare to disobey him. He had left them with Mrs. Peyton in the briefest preliminary interview, during which he spoke only of the catastrophe, shielding the woman from the presumption of having provoked it, and urging only the importance of settling the question of guardianship at once. It was odd that Mrs. Peyton had been less disturbed than he imagined she would be at even his charitable version of Susy's unfaithfulness to her; it even seemed to him that she had already suspected it. But as he was about to withdraw to leave her to meet them alone, she had stopped him suddenly.

"What would you advise me to do?"

It was his first interview with her since

the revelation of his own feelings. He looked into the pleading, troubled eyes of the woman he now knew he had loved, and stammered: —

"You alone can judge. Only you must remember that one cannot force an affection any more than one can prevent it."

He felt himself blushing, and, conscious of the construction of his words, he even fancied that she was displeased.

"Then you have no preference?" she said, a little impatiently.

"None."

She made a slight gesture with her handsome shoulders, but she only said, "I should have liked to have pleased you in this," and turned coldly away. He had left without knowing the result of the interview; but a few days later he received a letter from her stating that she had allowed Susy to return to her aunt, and that she had resigned all claims to her guardianship.

"It seemed to be a foregone conclusion," she wrote; "and although I cannot think such a change will be for her permanent welfare, it is her present *wish*, and who knows, indeed, if the change will be permanent? I have not allowed the legal

question to interfere with my judgment, although her friends must know that she forfeits any claim upon the estate by her action; but at the same time, in the event of her suitable marriage, I should try to carry out what I believe would have been Mr. Peyton's wishes."

There were a few lines of postscript: "It seems to me that the change would leave you more free to consult your own wishes in regard to continuing your friendship with Susy, and upon such a footing as may please you. I judge from Mrs. McClosky's conversation that she believed you thought you were only doing your duty in reporting to me, and that the circumstances had not altered the good terms in which you all three formerly stood."

Clarence had dropped the letter with a burning indignation that seemed to sting his eyes until a scalding moisture hid the words before him. What might not Susy have said? What exaggeration of his affection was she not capable of suggesting? He recalled Mrs. McClosky, and remembered her easy acceptance of him as Susy's lover. What had they told Mrs. Peyton? What must be her opinion of his deceit towards

herself? It was hard enough to bear this before he knew he loved her. It was intolerable now! And this is what she meant when she suggested that he should renew his old terms with Susy; it was for *him* that this ill-disguised, scornful generosity in regard to Susy's pecuniary expectations was intended. What should he do? He would write to her, and indignantly deny any clandestine affection for Susy. But could he do that, in honor, in truthfulness? Would it not be better to write and confess all? Yes, — *everything*.

Fortunately for his still boyish impulsiveness, it was at this time that the discovery of his own financial ruin came to him. The inquest on the body of Pedro Valdez and the confession of his confidant had revealed the facts of the fraudulent title and forged testamentary documents. Although it was correctly believed that Pedro had met his death in an escapade of gallantry or intrigue, the coroner's jury had returned a verdict of "accidental death," and the lesser scandal was lost in the wider, far-spreading disclosure of fraud. When he had resolved to assume all the liabilities of his purchase, he was obliged to write to Mrs. Peyton and

confess his ruin. But he was glad to remind her that it did not alter *her* status or security; he had only given her the possession, and she would revert to her original and now uncontested title. But as there was now no reason for his continuing the stewardship, and as he must adopt some profession and seek his fortune elsewhere, he begged her to relieve him of his duty. Albeit written with a throbbing heart and suffused eyes, it was a plain, business-like, and practical letter. Her reply was equally cool and matter of fact. She was sorry to hear of his losses, although she could not agree with him that they could logically sever his present connection with the rancho, or that, placed upon another and distinctly business footing, the occupation would not be as remunerative to him as any other. But, of course, if he had a preference for some more independent position, that was another question, although he would forgive her for using the privilege of her years to remind him that his financial and business success had not yet justified his independence. She would also advise him not to decide hastily, or, at least, to wait until she had again thoroughly gone over her hus-

band's papers with her lawyer, in reference to the old purchase of the Sisters' title, and the conditions under which it was bought. She knew that Mr. Brant would not refuse this as a matter of business, nor would that friendship, which she valued so highly, allow him to imperil the possession of the rancho by leaving it at such a moment. As soon as she had finished the examination of the papers, she would write again. Her letter seemed to leave him no hope, if, indeed, he had ever indulged in any. It was the practical kindliness of a woman of business, nothing more. As to the examination of her husband's papers, that was a natural precaution. He alone knew that they would give no record of a transaction which had never occurred. He briefly replied that his intention to seek another situation was unchanged, but that he would cheerfully await the arrival of his successor. Two weeks passed. Then Mr. Sanderson, Mrs. Peyton's lawyer, arrived, bringing an apologetic note from Mrs. Peyton. She was so sorry her business was still delayed, but as she had felt that she had no right to detain him entirely at Robles, she had sent to Mr. Sanderson to *temporarily* relieve him, that he

might be free to look around him or visit San Francisco in reference to his own business, only extracting a promise from him that he would return to Robles to meet her at the end of the week, before settling upon anything.

The bitter smile with which Clarence had read thus far suddenly changed. Some mysterious touch of unbusiness-like but womanly hesitation, that he had never noticed in her previous letters, gave him a faint sense of pleasure, as if her note had been perfumed. He had availed himself of the offer. It was on this visit to Sacramento that he had accidentally discovered the marriage of Susy and Hooker.

"It 's a great deal better business for her to have a husband in the 'profesh ' if she 's agoin' to stick to it," said his informant, Mrs. McClosky, "and she 's nothing if she ain't business and profesh, Mr. Brant. I never see a girl that was born for the stage — yes, you might say jess cut out o' the boards of the stage — as that girl Susy is! And that 's jest what 's the matter; and *you* know it, and *I* know it, and there you are!"

It was with these experiences that Clarence was to-day reëntering the wooded and

rocky gateway of the rancho from the high road of the *cañada;* but as he cantered up the first slope, through the drift of scarlet poppies that almost obliterated the track, and the blue and yellow blooms of the terraces again broke upon his view, he thought only of Mrs. Peyton's pleasure in this changed aspect of her old home. She had told him of it once before, and of her delight in it; and he had once thought how happy he should be to see it with her.

The servant who took his horse told him that the señora had arrived that morning from Santa Inez, bringing with her the two Señoritas Hernandez from the rancho of Los Canejos, and that other guests were expected. And there was the Señor Sanderson and his Reverence Padre Esteban. Truly an affair of hospitality, the first since the *padron* died. Whatever dream Clarence might have had of opportunities for confidential interview was rudely dispelled. Yet Mrs. Peyton had left orders to be informed at once of Don Clarencio's arrival.

As he crossed the *patio* and stepped upon the corridor he fancied he already detected in the internal arrangements the subtle influence of Mrs. Peyton's taste and the inde-

finable domination of the mistress. For an instant he thought of anticipating the servant and seeking her in the boudoir, but some instinct withheld him, and he turned into the study which he had used as an office. It was empty; a few embers glimmered on the hearth. At the same moment there was a light step behind him, and Mrs. Peyton entered and closed the door behind her. She was very beautiful. Although paler and thinner, there was an odd sort of animation about her, so unlike her usual repose that it seemed almost feverish.

"I thought we could talk together a few moments before the guests arrive. The house will be presently so full, and my duties as hostess commence."

"I was — about to seek you — in — n the boudoir," hesitated Clarence.

She gave an impatient shiver.

"Good heavens, not there! I shall never go there again. I should fancy every time I looked out of the window that I saw the head of that man between the bars. No! I am only thankful that I was n't here at the time, and that I can keep my remembrance of the dear old place unchanged." She checked herself a little abruptly, and

then added somewhat irrelevantly but cheerfully, "Well, you have been away? What have you done?"

"Nothing," said Clarence.

"Then you have kept your promise," she said, with the same nervous hilarity.

"I have returned here without making any other engagement," he said gravely; "but I have not altered my determination."

She shrugged her shoulders again, or, as it seemed, the skin of her tightly fitting black dress above them, with the sensitive shiver of a highly groomed horse, and moved to the hearth as if for warmth; put her slim, slippered foot upon the low fender, drawing, with a quick hand, the whole width of her skirt behind her until it clingingly accented the long, graceful curve from her hip to her feet. All this was so unlike her usual fastidiousness and repose that he was struck by it. With her eyes on the glowing embers of the hearth, and tentatively advancing her toe to its warmth and drawing it away, she said: —

"Of course, you must please yourself. I am afraid I have no right except that of habit and custom to keep you here; and you know," she added, with an only half-with-

held bitterness, "that they are not always very effective with young people who prefer to have the ordering of their own lives. But I have something still to tell you before you finally decide. I have, as you know, been looking over my — over Mr. Peyton's papers very carefully. Well, as a result, I find, Mr. Brant, that there is no record whatever of his wonderfully providential purchase of the Sisters' title from you; that he never entered into any written agreement with you, and never paid you a cent; and that, furthermore, his papers show me that he never even contemplated it; nor, indeed, even knew of *your* owning the title when he died. Yes, Mr. Brant, it was all to *your* foresight and prudence, and *your* generosity alone, that we owe our present possession of the rancho. When you helped us into that awful window, it was *your* house we were entering; and if it had been *you*, and not those wretches, who had chosen to shut the doors on us after the funeral, we could never have entered here again. Don't deny it, Mr. Brant. I have suspected it a long time, and when you spoke of changing *your* position, I determined to find out if it was n't *I* who had to leave the house rather

than you. One moment, please. And I did find out, and it *was* I. Don't speak, please, yet. And now," she said, with a quick return to her previous nervous hilarity, "knowing this, as you did, and knowing, too, that I would know it when I examined the papers, — don't speak, I 'm not through yet, — don't you think that it was just a *little* cruel for you to try to hurry me, and make me come here instead of your coming to *me* in San Francisco, when I gave you leave for that purpose?"

"But, Mrs. Peyton," gasped Clarence.

"Please don't interrupt me," said the lady, with a touch of her old imperiousness, "for in a moment I must join my guests. When I found you would n't tell me, and left it to me to find out, I could only go away as I did, and really leave you to control what I believed was your own property. And I thought, too, that I understood your motives, and, to be frank with you, *that* worried me; for I believed I knew the disposition and feelings of a certain person better than yourself."

"One moment," broke out Clarence, "you *must* hear me, now. Foolish and misguided as that purchase may have been, I swear to

you I had only one motive in making it, — to save the homestead for you and your husband, who had been my first and earliest benefactors. What the result of it was, you, as a business woman, know; your friends know; your lawyer will tell you the same. You owe me nothing. I have given you nothing but the repossession of this property, which any other man could have done, and perhaps less stupidly than I did. I would not have forced you to come here to hear this if I had dreamed of your suspicions, or even if I had simply understood that you would see me in San Francisco as I passed through."

"Passed through? Where were you going?" she said quickly.

"To Sacramento."

The abrupt change in her manner startled him to a recollection of Susy, and he blushed. She bit her lips, and moved towards the window.

"Then you saw her?" she said, turning suddenly towards him. The inquiry of her beautiful eyes was more imperative than her speech.

Clarence recognized quickly what he thought was his cruel blunder in touching

the half-healed wound of separation. But he had gone too far to be other than perfectly truthful now.

"Yes; I saw her on the stage," he said, with a return of his boyish earnestness; "and I learned something which I wanted you to first hear from me. She is *married*, — and to Mr. Hooker, who is in the same theatrical company with her. But I want you to think, as I honestly do, that it is the best for her. She has married in her profession, which is a great protection and a help to her success, and she has married a man who can look lightly upon certain qualities in her that others might not be so lenient to. His worst faults are on the surface, and will wear away in contact with the world, and he looks up to her as his superior. I gathered this from her friend, for I did not speak with her myself; I did not go there to see her. But as I expected to be leaving you soon, I thought it only right that as I was the humble means of first bringing her into your life, I should bring you this last news, which I suppose takes her out of it forever. Only I want you to believe that *you* have nothing to regret, and that *she* is neither lost nor unhappy."

The expression of suspicious inquiry on her face when he began changed gradually to perplexity as he continued, and then relaxed into a faint, peculiar smile. But there was not the slightest trace of that pain, wounded pride, indignation, or anger, that he had expected to see upon it.

"That means, I suppose, Mr. Brant, that *you* no longer care for her?"

The smile had passed, yet she spoke now with a half-real, half-affected archness that was also unlike her.

"It means," said Clarence with a white face, but a steady voice, "that I care for her now as much as I ever cared for her, no matter to what folly it once might have led me. But it means, also, that there was no time when I was not able to tell it to *you* as frankly as I do now" —

"One moment, please," she interrupted, and turned quickly towards the door. She opened it and looked out. "I thought they were calling me, — and — I — I — *must* go now, Mr. Brant. And without finishing my business either, or saying half I had intended to say. But wait" — she put her hand to her head in a pretty perplexity, "it 's a moonlight night, and I 'll propose

after dinner a stroll in the gardens, and you can manage to walk a little with me." She stopped again, returned, said, "It was very kind of you to think of me at Sacramento," held out her hand, allowed it to remain for an instant, cool but acquiescent, in his warmer grasp, and with the same odd youthfulness of movement and gesture slipped out of the door.

An hour later she was at the head of her dinner table, serene, beautiful, and calm, in her elegant mourning, provokingly inaccessible in the sweet deliberation of her widowed years; Padre Esteban was at her side with a local magnate, who had known Peyton and his wife, while Donna Rosita and a pair of liquid-tongued, childlike señoritas were near Clarence and Sanderson. To the priest Mrs. Peyton spoke admiringly of the changes in the rancho and the restoration of the Mission Chapel, and together they had commended Clarence from the level of their superior passionless reserve and years. Clarence felt hopelessly young and hopelessly lonely; the naïve prattle of the young girls beside him appeared infantine. In his abstraction, he heard Mrs. Peyton allude to the beauty of the night, and propose that

after coffee and chocolate the ladies should put on their wraps and go with her to the old garden. Clarence raised his eyes; she was not looking at him, but there was a slight consciousness in her face that was not there before, and the faintest color in her cheek, still lingering, no doubt, from the excitement of conversation.

It was a cool, tranquil, dewless night when they at last straggled out, mere black and white patches in the colorless moonlight. The brilliancy of the flower-hued landscape was subdued under its passive, pale austerity; even the gray and gold of the second terrace seemed dulled and confused. At any other time Clarence might have lingered over this strange effect, but his eyes followed only a tall figure, in a long striped burnous, that moved gracefully beside the *soutaned* priest. As he approached, it turned towards him.

"Ah! here you are. I just told Father Esteban that you talked of leaving to-morrow, and that he would have to excuse me a few moments while you showed me what you had done to the old garden."

She moved beside him, and, with a hesitation that was not unlike a more youthful

timidity, slipped her hand through his arm. It was for the first time, and, without thinking, he pressed it impulsively to his side. I have already intimated that Clarence's reserve was at times qualified by singular directness.

A few steps carried them out of hearing; a few more, and they seemed alone in the world. The long adobe wall glanced away emptily beside them, and was lost; the black shadows of the knotted pear-trees were beneath their feet. They began to walk with the slight affectation of treading the shadows as if they were patterns on a carpet. Clarence was voiceless, and yet he seemed to be moving beside a spirit that must be first addressed.

But it was flesh and blood nevertheless.

"I interrupted you in something you were saying when I left the office," she said quietly.

"I was speaking of Susy," returned Clarence eagerly; "and"—

"Then you need n't go on," interrupted Mrs. Peyton quickly. "I understand you, and believe you. I would rather talk of something else. We have not yet arranged how I can make restitution to you for the

capital you sank in saving this place. You will be reasonable, Mr. Brant, and not leave me with the shame and pain of knowing that you ruined yourself for the sake of your old friends. For it is no more a sentimental idea of mine to feel in this way than it is a fair and sensible one for you to imply that a mere quibble of construction absolves me from responsibility. Mr. Sanderson himself admits that the repossession you gave us is a fair and legal basis for any arrangement of sharing or division of the property with you, that might enable you to remain here and continue the work you have so well begun. Have you no suggestion, or must it come from *me*, Mr. Brant?"

"Neither. Let us not talk of that now."

She did not seem to notice the boyish doggedness of his speech, except so far as it might have increased her inconsequent and nervously pitched levity.

"Then suppose we speak of the Misses Hernandez, with whom you scarcely exchanged a word at dinner, and whom I invited for you and your fluent Spanish. They are charming girls, even if they are a little stupid. But what can I do? If I am to live here, I must have a few young people

around me, if only to make the place cheerful for others. Do you know I have taken a great fancy to Miss Rogers, and have asked her to visit me. I think she is a good friend of yours, although perhaps she is a little shy. What 's the matter? You have nothing against her, have you?"

Clarence had stopped short. They had reached the end of the pear-tree shadows. A few steps more would bring them to the fallen south wall of the garden and the open moonlight beyond, but to the right an olive alley of deeper shadow diverged.

"No," he said, with slow deliberation; "I have to thank Mary Rogers for having discovered something in me that I have been blindly, foolishly, and hopelessly struggling with."

"And, pray, what was that?" said Mrs. Peyton sharply.

"That I love you!"

Mrs. Peyton was fairly startled. The embarrassment of any truth is apt to be in its eternal abruptness, which no deviousness of tact or circumlocution of diplomacy has ever yet surmounted. Whatever had been in her heart, or mind, she was unprepared for this directness. The bolt had

dropped from the sky; they were alone; there was nothing between the stars and the earth but herself and this man and this truth; it could not be overlooked, surmounted, or escaped from. A step or two more would take her out of the garden into the moonlight, but always into this awful frankness of blunt and outspoken nature. She hesitated, and turned the corner into the olive shadows. It was, perhaps, more dangerous; but less shameless, and less like truckling. And the appallingly direct Clarence instantly followed.

"I know you will despise me, hate me; and, perhaps, worst of all, disbelieve me; but I swear to you, now, that I have always loved you, — yes, *always!* When first I came here, it was not to see my old playmate, but *you*, for I had kept the memory of you as I first saw you when a boy, and you have always been my ideal. I have thought of, dreamed of, worshiped, and lived for no other woman. Even when I found Susy again, grown up here at your side; even when I thought that I might, with your consent, marry her, it was that I might be with *you* always; that I might be a part of *your* home, your family, and have

a place with her in *your* heart; for it was you I loved, and *you* only. Don't laugh at me, Mrs. Peyton, it is the truth, the whole truth, I am telling you. God help me!"

If she only *could* have laughed, — harshly, ironically, or even mercifully and kindly! But it would not come. And she burst out: —

"I am not laughing. Good heavens, don't you see? It is *me* you are making ridiculous."

"*You* ridiculous?" he said in a momentarily choked, half-stupefied voice. "You — a beautiful woman, my superior in everything, the mistress of these lands where I am only steward — made ridiculous, not by my presumption, but by my confession? Was the saint you just now admired in Father Esteban's chapel ridiculous because of the *peon* clowns who were kneeling before it?"

"Hush! This is wicked! Stop!"

She felt she was now on firm ground, and made the most of it in voice and manner. She must draw the line somewhere, and she would draw it beween passion and impiety.

"Not until I have told you all, and I

must before I leave you. I loved you when I came here, — even when your husband was alive. Don't be angry, Mrs. Peyton; *he* would not, and need not, have been angry; he would have pitied the foolish boy, who, in the very innocence and ignorance of his passion, might have revealed it to him as he did to everybody but *one*. And yet, I sometimes think you might have guessed it, had you thought of me at all. It must have been on my lips that day I sat with you in the boudoir. I know that I was filled with it; with it and with you; with your presence, with your beauty, your grace of heart and mind, — yes, Mrs. Peyton, even with your own unrequited love for Susy. Only, then, I knew not what it was."

"But I think *I* can tell you what it was then, and now," said Mrs. Peyton, recovering her nervous little laugh, though it died a moment after on her lips. "I remember it very well. You told me then that *I reminded you of your mother*. Well, I am not old enough to be your mother, Mr. Brant, but I am old enough to have been, and might have been, the mother of your wife. That was what you meant then; that

is what you mean now. I was wrong to accuse you of trying to make me ridiculous. I ask your pardon. Let us leave it as it was that day in the boudoir, as it is *now*. Let me still remind you of your mother, — I know she must have been a good woman to have had so good a son, — and when you have found some sweet young girl to make you happy, come to me for a mother's blessing, and we will laugh at the recollection and misunderstanding of this evening."

Her voice did not, however, exhibit that exquisite maternal tenderness which the beatific vision ought to have called up, and the persistent voice of Clarence could not be evaded in the shadow.

"I said you reminded me of my mother," he went on at her side, "because I knew her and lost her only as a child. She never was anything to me but a memory, and yet an ideal of all that was sweet and lovable in woman. Perhaps it was a dream of what she might have been when she was as young in years as you. If it pleases you still to misunderstand me, it may please you also to know that there is a reminder of her even in this. I have no remembrance of a word of affection from her, nor a caress; I have

been as hopeless in my love for her who was my mother, as of the woman I would make my wife."

"But you have seen no one, you know no one, you are young, you scarcely know your own self! You will forget this, you will forget *me!* And if — if — I should — listen to you, what would the world say, what would *you* yourself say a few years hence? Oh, be reasonable. Think of it, — it would be so wild, — so mad! so — so — utterly ridiculous!"

In proof of its ludicrous quality, two tears escaped her eyes in the darkness. But Clarence caught the white flash of her withdrawn handkerchief in the shadow, and captured her returning hand. It was trembling, but did not struggle, and presently hushed itself to rest in his.

"I 'm not only a fool but a brute," he said in a lower voice. "Forgive me. I have given you pain, — you, for whom I would have died."

They had both stopped. He was still holding her sleeping hand. His arm had stolen around the burnous so softly that it followed the curves of her figure as lightly as a fold of the garment, and was presum-

ably unfelt. Grief has its privileges, and suffering exonerates a questionable situation. In another moment her fair head *might* have dropped upon his shoulder. But an approaching voice uprose in the adjoining broad *allée*. It might have been the world speaking through the voice of the lawyer Sanderson.

"Yes, he is a good fellow, and an intelligent fellow, too, but a perfect child in his experience of mankind."

They both started, but Mrs. Peyton's hand suddenly woke up and grasped his firmly. Then she said in a higher, but perfectly level tone: —

"Yes, I think with you we had better look at it again in the sunlight to-morrow. But here come our friends; they have probably been waiting for us to join them and go in."

. . . . . .

The wholesome freshness of early morning was in the room when Clarence awoke, cleared and strengthened. His resolution had been made. He would leave the rancho that morning, to enter the world again and seek his fortune elsewhere. This was only right to *her*, whose future it should never be

said he had imperiled by his folly and inexperience; and if, in a year or two of struggle he could prove his right to address her again. he would return. He had not spoken to her since they had parted in the garden, with the grim truths of the lawyer ringing in his ears, but he had written a few lines of farewell, to be given to her after he had left. He was calm in his resolution, albeit a little pale and hollow-eyed for it.

He crept downstairs in the gray twilight of the scarce-awakened house, and made his way to the stables. Saddling his horse, and mounting, he paced forth into the crisp morning air. The sun, just risen, was everywhere bringing out the fresh color of the flower-strewn terraces, as the last night's shadows, which had hidden them, were slowly beaten back. He cast a last look at the brown adobe quadrangle of the quiet house, just touched with the bronzing of the sun, and then turned his face towards the highway. As he passed the angle of the old garden he hesitated, but, strong in his resolution, he put the recollection of last night behind him, and rode by without raising his eyes.

"Clarence!"

It was *her* voice. He wheeled his horse. She was standing behind the *grille* in the old wall as he had seen her standing on the day he had ridden to his rendezvous with Susy. A Spanish *manta* was thrown over her head and shoulders, as if she had dressed hastily, and had run out to intercept him while he was still in the stable. Her beautiful face was pale in its black-hooded recess, and there were faint circles around her lovely eyes.

"You were going without saying 'good-by'!" she said softly.

She passed her slim white hand between the grating. Clarence leaped to the ground, caught it, and pressed it to his lips. But he did not let it go.

"No! no!" she said, struggling to withdraw it. "It is better as it is — as — as you have decided it to be. Only I could not let you go thus, — without a word. There now, — go, Clarence, go. Please! Don't you see I am behind these bars? Think of them as the years that separate us, my poor, dear, foolish boy. Think of them as standing between us, growing closer, heavier, and more cruel and hopeless as the years go on."

Ah, well! they had been good bars a hundred and fifty years ago, when it was thought as necessary to repress the innocence that was behind them as the wickedness that was without. They had done duty in the convent at Santa Inez, and the monastery of Santa Barbara, and had been brought hither in Governor Micheltorrenas' time to keep the daughters of Robles from the insidious contact of the outer world, when they took the air in their cloistered pleasance. Guitars had tinkled against them in vain, and they had withstood the stress and storm of love tokens. But, like many other things which have had their day and time, they had retained their semblance of power, even while rattling loosely in their sockets, only because no one had ever thought of putting them to the test, and, in the strong hand of Clarence, assisted, perhaps, by the leaning figure of Mrs. Peyton, I grieve to say that the whole *grille* suddenly collapsed, became a frame of tinkling iron, and then clanked, bar by bar, into the road. Mrs. Peyton uttered a little cry and drew back, and Clarence, leaping the ruins, caught her in his arms.

For a moment only, for she quickly with-

drew from them, and although the morning sunlight was quite rosy on her cheeks, she said gravely, pointing to the dismantled opening: —

"I suppose you *must* stay now, for you never could leave me here alone and defenseless."

He stayed. And with this fulfillment of his youthful dreams the romance of his young manhood seemed to be completed, and so closed the second volume of this trilogy. But what effect that fulfillment of youth had upon his maturer years, or the fortunes of those who were nearly concerned in it, may be told in a later and final chronicle.

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